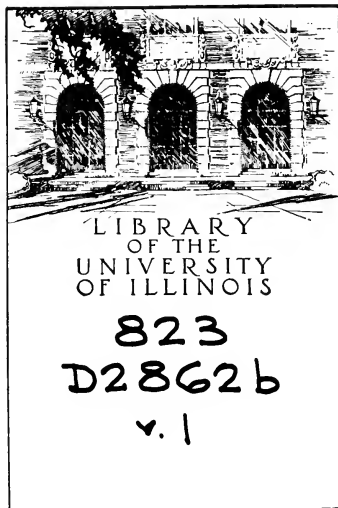




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THE BROWNS AND THE SMITHS.

THE BROWNS AND THE SMITHS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ ANNE DYSART,” “ ONWARDS,”

&c., &c.

“ *Nurse*: His name is Romeo, and a Montague;
The only son of your great enemy.”

Romeo and Juliet.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE BROWNS AND THE SMITHS.

CHAPTER I.

VERY HACKNEYED.

“THERE is nothing new under the sun,” said the wise monarch, and if this could be said with truth nearly three thousand years ago, when the world was not much more than half as old as it is at present, how doubly stale must all things have now become!

You have all, my readers, heard, *ad nau-*

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B

seam, of the Montagues and Capulets—the Yorkists and Lancastrians; the names are as familiar as that rivalry of race, and hatred of families, which, in our days at least, are not confined to princes and nobles, but may be found in every market town, in every country village, and, probably, in every thieves' quarter in the world.

But though there is nothing new, not even similes, though originality is more than ever impossible to us in these latter days, yet the picture of human passions and human follies, be it only true, however commonplace, never fails to make us weep or laugh, as the occasion demands. It is this which encourages me to introduce to your notice the Browns and the Smiths, and to hope that you will even pardon an allusion to the Monta-

gues and Capulets. It is so much easier to take up an old simile than to rummage through one's daily decreasing stores of memory for a new one. And then, the hackneyed one has the advantage of being understood by everybody; even by those—if in these days of universal knowledge there be any such—who have only heard of the Montagues and Capulets by way of reference.

Now, the Browns and the Smiths were the Montagues and Capulets of the Borough of Goslingford.

Goslingford is a thorough old English country town, and, in the days of which I speak, though these are not very remote, had not been invaded even by a railway. It consists of four streets, at right angles, somewhat narrow, but very picturesque; the colouring, old, dusky,

and mellowed, and the tall chimneys, and overhanging upper-stories, throwing, in the summer sunshine, those shadows, broad and deep, so dear to the heart of the accomplished gentleman who writes the "Stones of Venice." A broad river, bearing a little—a very little—traffic on its bosom, steals lazily by, past the little town, and through green meadows, mostly flat, onwards to the sea. Cattle repose in these meadows, amid cowslips and buttercups, and under the shade of tall elms and wide-spread oaks ; and low hills, not robed, however, in "the azure hue" of distance, but chequered with the unmistakable yellow and green of corn-fields or turnip-fields, gird in the pleasant vale, which has many a counterpart in rural England. Thus, though a pretty and an interesting old town, it is a very everyday one—

being, in fact, in architecture and situation, the very commonest type of an English *uncommercial* town. The people, too, are the very kind of people who reside in such towns, even in these days of rapid and constant communication of every place with every place else, when everybody is becoming, outwardly at least, so like everybody else, that national and local distinctions, and even individual character, seem in danger of being obliterated by the modern monotony of refinement and cultivation. But as yet, at Goslingford, most people still dined at three o'clock, and went out to tea-parties at six; and it was, by many persons, thought very fine and foolish of the Smiths, when they gave a dinner-party at the irrational hour of half-past six, at which the wine was handed round by Thomas, indoors man-

servant, and Sarah, housemaid, instead of being put on the table, that the guests might drink with each other in the old friendly way, when "people were not too fine to enjoy themselves."

The tide of public feeling, that is, the feeling of the polite world of Goslingford, for a time rose decidedly on the Brown side.

"Old Mr. Brown," said Miss Clara Wellby, to her friend Miss Harriet Richards, "would never have permitted such new-fangled nonsense. But people now-a-days must all be finer and wiser than their fathers. Perhaps next time the meat will be all carved at the side-table."

"It is sad to see so much vanity and display among people professing Christian principles," rejoined Miss Richards. "We shall hear of them playing cards next."

“Cards !” cried Miss Clara ; “ and suppose they do take a hand at whist, or have a sixpenny pool at commerce, where is the harm ? People were just as good and as wise long ago, when——”

“Clara !” said Miss Richards, with grief and solemnity.

“Well, well,” cried Miss Wellby, forbearingly, “we are too old friends to quarrel, Harriet ; but I remember the time when you could enjoy a rubber yourself.”

“I was then in the——”

“Never mind,” cried Clara, impatiently, “nobody but the Rector shall preach to me. But about the Smiths, as we were saying. The Browns would never have done such a thing, and the Browns have a much better right to be uppish than the Smiths. But that is always the way—it is always your people who have no right that set up to be

extra-genteel, and your people that talk about equality and the rights of the people, and all that sort of stuff, that are the most jealous of their own dignity, and the most hoity-toity with their servants. The Smiths are ten times as exclusive as the Browns, and yet the Browns visit people that would never think of going near the Smiths."

"Very true," said Miss Richards, but in somewhat an unwilling tone, though continuing with an air of candour, "and the Misses Smith have been learning botany, and astronomy, and geology, and ever so many languages—very dangerous knowledge, which has led many astray. And young Smith away to London and the Continent, as if he would not have been far better and safer in Goslingford, in his father's office, as his father was before him."

“Yes, what served his father might have served him. And to send his son to the Continent to be brought up among foreigners!” exclaimed Miss Wellby, with ineffable contempt.

“And they are good people, too—members of the Evangelical Alliance.”

“Yes, but they are dissenters.”

“That does not signify, if they are——”

“It does signify. I never knew any dissenters but themselves I could endure; and as for the Evangelical Alliance, people were quite as good, let me tell you, Harriet, when there were no Evangelical Alliances, and when people did not ‘make broad their phylacteries,’ as they do now.”

“Thank you, Clara,” said Miss Richards, half in sorrow, half in anger; “I know I must bear the reproach.”

“Good morning now, Harriet, we won’t quarrel; we are far too old friends for that.” And for the moment, excited and triumphant, Miss Wellby departed.

She had not been gone half-an-hour when Miss Richards’ anger was utterly overcome by her sorrow.

“Poor Clara!” she thought, “how I wish I could do something for her!”

For twenty years this had been one of the most earnest wishes of this good creature; but all her attempts had ended something in the manner of the above. Clara always came off triumphant and affronted. Fortunately the affront never lasted long. On the present occasion it only lasted till the next day. Hearing the following morning that Miss Richards was laid up with influenza, down came Clara through the fog and rain, at the risk of catching the complaint

herself, and nursed and watched over her old friend as if she had been her child or her mother. Clara Wellby was as kind a soul as any in Goslingford. Wherever there was sickness or distress, there was Clara Wellby sure to be found, comforting, helping, scolding. She had little to give, but she gave it almost too freely. No baby head had pillowed on her bosom, no soft lisping voice had awakened in her heart those thrills of tender delight which parents only know ; but I challenge the wifhood and motherhood of England to produce more benevolent or more generous feelings than those which moved the actions of Miss Clara Wellby.

Miss Wellby and Miss Richards were two middle-aged spinsters, or perhaps they were somewhat beyond middle age. They were both natives of Goslingford, and though

perpetually quarrelling, had been fast friends from early childhood. They were, however, about as unlike in taste, character, disposition, and fortune as it was possible for two persons to be.

Miss Wellby was the daughter of a former Rector of Goslingford,—Miss Richards owned the more humble parentage of an auctioneer and land-agent. When young their families had moved in rather different “spheres,” but Clara Wellby—handsome, lively, admired, and sought after even by the county magnates—was not the woman to disown the friendship of her plain, timid, humble school-fellow, whom she had always patronized and protected. Clara had had many admirers, and one or two advantageous offers, which she had declined. Indeed, she was in the habit of treating love-matters as

a jest, though it had been whispered that an early disappointment had something to do with her hard-heartedness. But be that as it may, she never wore the willow, nor was the milk of human kindness ever curdled in her by the slightest infusion of acidity.

At thirty years of age Harriet Richards was deeply impressed by the preaching of one of the Goslingford curates, and from that time forth gave up cards, novels, fashion, and might be seen constantly going about in a bonnet shaped like a Quaker's, a lanky dress, and a hideous shawl, with a basket of tracts on her arm.

Ten years afterwards her father died and left her a large fortune—a great change to Harriet, who had been brought up in a very homely and frugal manner, and who

had no mind above her destiny. At first she hardly knew what to do with it, for, being no hoarder, she felt it ought to be spent. So she took a large, gloomy house, which she furnished in a dull, tasteless, expensive way—had a number of lazy servants who imposed on her, innumerable fat dogs and sleepy cats, and a large carriage and pair of horses, which she always feared might be over-fatigued. She also bestowed great sums on religious societies, and gave lavishly to the poor—particularly to those who admired the Evangelical Alliance.

And when the old Rector died, leaving his daughter with very scanty means, she offered her old friend a home in her house and a share of her wealth.

Very unwonted drops glistened in Clara's bright eyes, and she wrung her friend's hand painfully.

“No, no, Harriet, it will never do. We should quarrel all day long. The sight of that heavy sideboard, and those great green blinds, would throw me into low spirits. I must have something cheerful to look at, and every time I got into the coach I should fancy I was going to a funeral. And then, you know, I must have my novel in the evening, and that would make you miserable, and you would think it so worldly in me to have my dresses made like other people, though, by the by, I understand it is quite the thing now for your very pious people to go visiting the poor, and preaching to miners, dressed out in silk and flowers and jewellery. Everybody must preach now-a-days, even fine ladies, so you see, it would be quite the thing for you, Harriet, to have a decent bonnet.”

Miss Wellby spoke quickly. She was not fond of demonstrations, and was eager to prevent her friend pressing her offer. She could scarcely keep from embracing Harriet, and crying heartily as it was. Miss Richards now murmured something about "vanity," on which Clara asked triumphantly—

"If there was not quite as much vanity in paying two shillings a yard for a ribbon, when one at one shilling would do just as well, as in putting it on like other people after it was bought?"

Miss Wellby did not go to live with Miss Richards, but took the tiniest of cottages, with the tiniest of gardens, quite at the other end of the town, near the church, and close to the large house where the Browns lived. But though the smallest, it was the very neatest and brightest little abode in

the county; and its neatness had none of the ponderous formality which, as Clara said, made poor Harriet's furniture so depressing. Cheerful was the pattern of the Kidderminster carpet on the floor, and the shilling paper on the walls of the little drawing-room; cheerful the snowy muslin curtains and the glass of gay flowers on the table,—cheerful as Miss Clara herself, in her fashionably-made dresses and cheap stylish bonnets, which were always becoming to her still handsome face, and tall, straight, almost youthful figure. “What a contrast!” said everybody, when Clara was seen walking with her friend; the little, awkward old-maidish figure of the latter, clad in the dingiest and dearest of silk dresses, made in the most ludicrously old-fashioned manner, surmounted by an ugly shawl, ungracefully put on, and her plain,

long-chinned face, shaded by her Quaker-bonnet.

I would not, however, have the reader to suppose, from anything I have said, that Miss Clara laughed at religion, for that would be giving an altogether wrong idea of her character. She only laughed at her friend's fashion of it ; and her friend thought it could not be genuine in any other fashion.

One point, however, these ladies had in common—they were very fond of a thorough good gossip.

“ What are our tongues made for but to talk ?” said Miss Clara.

“ Yes, dear Clara, but,” sighing, “ we must not forget that the tongue is a world of iniquity.”

“ It is St. James says that, Harriet, and I thought all your kind of people did not think much of St. James.”

“ Really, Clara, your levity——”

“ Well, at any rate, you would not have thought much of him if he had been anybody else but St. James.”

Now Harriet and Clara were almost equally illogical, but Clara had always the advantage of readiness ; and perhaps, after all, in all arguments, readiness is of more importance than logic, if victory be the desirable point.

“ But,” says the reader, “ what has become all this time of the Browns and the Smiths ?”

CHAPTER II.

HANNAH BROWN.

WILLIAM BROWN and Thoms Smith were two solicitors, of great respectability, and the chief people in Goslingford. In everything they were rivals. At elections, Mr. Brown was agent for the Reds, and Mr. Smith for the Greens. Mr. Brown was a zealous Churchman, Mr. Smith a dissenter. Mr. Brown liked everything old—old houses, old gardens, old acquaintances, old fashions.

In idea he belonged to the times of our grandfathers. He was a man professing religion; but his religion was not of the shape prevailing just at present. It had considerable resemblance to that of Miss Clara Wellby. As I have said, he was a Churchman, but he almost equally repudiated Tractarianism and Evangelicalism, and he would cordially echo Miss Wellby's opinion that people were quite as good when there were no such things. Mr. Smith, or rather Mr. Smith's family, were innovators, as far at least as society at Goslingford would permit innovation; for though Goslingford politics were, on the whole, liberal, and though the municipal and electioneering orators at times talked largely of "progress" and "enlightenment," and "keeping pace with the age," Goslingford, in its heart of hearts, did not like

anything very different from what it had always been accustomed to. It looked coldly on Mr. Smith's late hours, and scientific, extra-fashionable daughters. It commended Hannah Brown, who had never been at a ladies' college, and who had never been seen walking out either with a hammer or a japanned tincase. Goslingford admired Mrs. Ellis's writings amazingly, and presented the "Women of England," and "The Wives of England," on birthdays and wedding-days, to all its female acquaintance. Yet the Smiths, though much more commented upon and criticised than the Browns, seemed quite as popular. The ladies copied their London dresses, and though they did dine at half-past six, their invitations were rather sought after, and their parties were not, as might have been supposed, too formal for enjoyment. Most

of the genteel people in Goslingford visited both the Browns and the Smiths, but all sided with one or other of these factions. Miss Clara Wellby was a Brownite, Miss Harriet Richards was a Smithite; though Miss Clara allowed that the Miss Smiths dressed well, and Miss Harriet admitted that Hannah Brown was a modest, nice girl.

Nobody ever invited the Browns and the Smiths to the same party. Not that the Browns and the Smiths had quarrelled in so outrageous a manner as not to be on speaking terms. That is not the fashion now-a-days, except among very foolish people. On the contrary, Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith forgave each other their mutual offences; at least, they forgave each other as Christians, if not as men and lawyers. The Browns and the Smiths did not

“With brawls disturb the quiet of the streets.”

When Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith met each other, they bowed with great politeness. So did Miss Brown and the Miss Smiths. They were Browns and Smiths, you see, and not Montagues and Capulets; and whoever heard of two respectable elderly attorneys drawing their swords, or even doubling their fists, English fashion, at each other, however great their antagonism?

Yet there is nothing new under the sun, and the very same spirit animated the commonplace Browns and Smiths in our own vulgar days, that wrought on the Montagues and Capulets "in the brave days of old." That pretty little table in Mr. Smith's drawing-room, at Tudor Lodge, is, after all, only a bit of maple-wood, with exactly the same properties as any other bit of maple-wood. *Cotelettes de*

mouton à la soubise are, as to all substantial qualities, only good English mutton chops, with a little dandified sauce and frippery frying; and so Montagues and Capulets were only a more aristocratic and refined kind of Browns and Smiths. Or were they more refined?

I am not by any means certain that a modern grocer, of average fortune and education, would not be shocked if he were, by chance, to find himself in my Lady Capulet's saloon, by the want of refinement in the furniture, and the want of manners in the company.

But, though no Brown had ever run any Smith through the body, tongues can pierce as well as swords, and the Browns and the Smiths had many sad tales to relate to their several confidants, of mutual ungentlemanliness and unfairness —

tales which, somehow or other, always oozed out, in a quiet way, to the whole public.

A generation or two back Mr. Smith's progenitor had been a clerk in the office of Mr. Brown's grandfather, or great grandfather; but, having quarrelled, the Smith of that day set up for himself. While he had been with Mr. Brown it had always been supposed that he shared that gentleman's sentiments; but, after the separation, it was discovered that his opinions were exactly antagonistic. He was immediately taken by the hand by the anti-Brown faction in the borough, and, ere long, was put forward for the town-council, and, in time, for the mayoralty. From that time the Smiths had held their heads as high as the Browns. But even after this elevation, the *élite*, the *crème de la*

crème, of Goslingford, did not, for a time visit the Smiths. It was even hinted that they were pushing and vulgar; but we all know, ever since we wrote in copy-books, that perseverance, like faith, removes mountains. And so the perseverance of the Smiths removed even the mountain of country-town exclusivism. The Smiths were a race of people who never lost anything for want of trying for it. Their pluck—the Brownites called it brass—was wonderful. Where the Browns were too proud or too lazy to befriend themselves, the Smiths stepped in preventing them. They ought to have been celebrated in Mr. Smiles's book as remarkable instances of Self-Help. But, notwithstanding, the Smiths were good people enough—at least the Smiths of the generation of which I am writing.

What the Smith — the original Smith, who so suddenly changed his political and religious principles — was, it does not now concern me to say, though I may have my own opinion. To say the least of it, he chose an unfortunate time for his character, if it was a highly propitious one for his interests, though the anti-Brown faction always upheld his recantation as an act of magnanimous candour. But our Smith — the Thomas Smith already mentioned, was a conscientious dissenter—at least, he thought so himself—an indulgent and fond father, and, though with a sharp eye to his own interest, an honest and honourable man, whatever the Brownites might say, and wonderfully benevolent for a lawyer. He would have been friendly even with Mr. Brown, if Mr. Brown would have let him; but that

elderly solicitor, or attorney, as he called himself—"attorneys, in his day, were not ashamed of being attorneys"—rode, as his rival said, such a high horse, that it was impossible.

"He always treats me as if I were no better than a pettifogger," said Mr. Thomas Smith, not unreasonably affronted, "as if I were going to refuse Sir George's business when it was offered to me, with my large family to provide for. It is very different with Brown, who has only that girl Hannah, poor man!" added Mr. Smith, with a momentary feeling for the family misfortunes of his rival; then adding, with a mingling of compassion and bitterness, as he continued his after-dinner *tête-à-tête* with his wife, "I believe he thought I was glad when that poor boy of his died."

"Then, my dear," said Mrs. Smith—who

was a quick-tempered woman, and to her kind husband a most affectionate wife, and the most thorough-going of his partisans, though the Brownites said that in his marriage even he had "had an eye to the main chance,"—"I am astonished at his wickedness. I did not think even old Brown would have been so uncharitable. And to indulge in such feelings, too, after such chastenings as he has had. What a long illness poor Mrs. Brown's was, and then the little girl that died of measles. His sorrows seem to have had no effect on his stony heart. I never knew such an obstinate man. I have no patience with him."

Now, unlike his wife, it was when he thought of his sorrows that Mr. Smith had a little patience with his rival. He could at such moments even make some allow-

ance for Mr. Brown's bitterness and obstinacy, however much they might gall him at other times. Now as he looked from the pleasant though spirited face of his wife, and from the comfortable dessert and wine on the table at his three handsome daughters swinging their younger brother in a swing which hung from a high tree at the further end of the flower-decked lawn, he thought with pity of poor Brown in his great old house by the church, with only poor little Hannah stealing about the gloomy, old-fashioned chambers.

After a few seconds' pause, Mrs. Smith continued—

“Even if he had lived, poor puny little fellow, he would never have been a match for our Edgar; and as for Hannah, I am quite sorry for her, poor little ignorant, unformed thing!”

And Mrs. Smith glanced through the window, too, with looks of proud complacency.

“How do you know, my dear, that she is ignorant and unformed? I did not know you had ever spoken to her. Clara Wellby says she is clever.”

“Oh, but you know all Miss Wellby’s geese are swans, and she will hear of nothing but perfection in those Browns. They are church people, you know, and with Miss Wellby that is everything. But I must go and see about Edgar’s room—he is to be home to-morrow.”

And with a proud mother’s delight in a first-born son, Mrs. Smith went joyfully to prepare for the return of hers after some years’ absence.

Smiths and Browns have their pride as well as Montagues and Capulets, and to

them, as to the whole human race, belongs the same tale of anxious affection, triumphant love, disappointment, sorrow, and sadness—the old, old tale, never new, but ever pathetic.

As I have already said, no railway had yet reached Goslingford. There was a station, however, about ten miles from the place ; and a vehicle, something between an omnibus and an old-fashioned stage-coach, conveyed passengers to and from that borough. About a dozen miles further, upon the line of railway, there was a manufacturing town of some importance—of great importance to the Goslingford ladies, as most of their fashions were derived from thence, and most of them when young had been sent to a fashionable boarding school, there to be “finished.” To have been “finished” at Miss Slater’s was for a

long time at Goslingford synonymous with being in possession of every accomplishment the heart of woman could desire or the eye of man admire. But the Miss Smiths had taken a higher flight. They had been "finished" in London at a "Ladies' College," where there were lecturers on all the sciences, professors of all the languages and literatures, and where "artists of celebrity" gave instruction in every kind of art. At this feminine university the Miss Smiths learned "everything," — at least so said Goslingford gossip, with a curious mixture of awe and contempt. No wonder, then, that the Miss Smiths so far outshone the Goslingford ladies in general, and Hannah Brown in particular—poor Hannah Brown never even having been at Miss Slater's. Goslingford had been of opinion that Mr. Brown had done wisely

“not to turn Hannah’s head” by sending her to London ; and Miss Wellby remarked that “people long ago were much more amusing and much less conceited when they had not learned so many things.” But it was a different affair not sending her to Miss Slater’s. Even Miss Wellby could not defend that. It was making poor Hannah inferior to other Goslingford girls, and with William Brown’s fortune, too, and Hannah an only daughter !

Hannah said nothing—showed nothing, but she felt it keenly herself, poor girl ! In her simple heart she probably overrated the advantages to be obtained at Miss Slater’s—as, indeed, we are all apt to overrate those advantages which we have just missed obtaining.

Hannah did her best to supply herself the deficiencies of her education. She

practised diligently at the handsome piano her father had given her (the only new thing in the house), and accompanied her performance with her own wood-notes wild. She copied the ancient arches, the picturesque tower, and the old porch of the church with photographic accuracy, and she made sketches of all the trees and all the decaying stumps in the neighbourhood. She even tried her hand at bead mats, at wax flowers, at potichomanie. But somehow or other all her own performances seemed to herself to be failures—not like other people's. And certainly they were not very like other people's—in Goslingford, at least. .

Once, when Hannah Brown had taken courage to show one of her little pencil sketches to an acquaintance—the subject, an ancient oak, with one green branch, and

the others sapless and leafless, a gipsy-cart, and one or two figures beneath it, and a donkey in the background—the lady in question had looked at it, and in a careless tone, without seeming to see it, had pronounced it “very pretty,” and then gone on to describe the exquisite view of Tintern Abbey, by moonlight, in water-colours, done at the college by Miss Venetia Smith. Poor Hannah never showed her drawings again. She was proud and shy, and loved approbation, and such people have a keen sense of mortification.

Hannah’s attempts at the sciences were very humble. She had read Hugh Miller’s “Testimony of the Rocks,” Mrs. Somerville’s “Physical Geography,” and a few popular papers in the publications of the Messrs. Chambers. She had made a most

valiant attempt at "Kosmos," and the "Connection of the Physical Sciences," but had been utterly routed by the hard words. She had tried mathematics, but had never even reached the *pons asinorum*, it was so intolerably dry, and the dread conviction began to force itself upon her mind that her capacity by no means equalled her ambition. What wonderful girls the Miss Smiths must be!—and how superior to her! Now, if Hannah Brown had been an angel, she would, of course, have been delighted to be inferior to the Miss Smiths, but she was no angel—only a girl, though equal, perhaps superior, to the average in amiability; therefore she was vexed and depressed. She had been taught French, for that could be acquired in Goslingford, and she had purchased a book called "German without a Master," by means of

which she had endeavoured to make herself mistress of that crabbed but romantic tongue. She did not, however, acquire facility in it with that rapidity which the preface of her book promised, and again poor Hannah felt a keen sense of inferiority, not only of attainment, but of ability. For general literature she had a greater aptitude, and, during her long, mostly solitary days, devoured quantities of books, her father allowing her to subscribe to as many libraries as she pleased. For some few years, reading was to Hannah at once a pursuit and end; but at twenty years of age, the *cui bono* of that, and of her whole existence, began to suggest itself painfully to her mind. Oh! how weary seemed her life in that silent, empty house! and how purposeless!

Hannah Brown had read and admired

Keble—privately—for he was tabooed by Goslingford in general, and she knew

“The daily round, the common task,
Furnish all we ought to ask ;”

and that they did not to her, was surely a proof that she had an ill-regulated mind. Sometimes the large, tall, substantial red house with the high flight of steps up to the invisible-green door, seemed to Hannah almost as silent and sepulchral as the heavy, square tomb, like a huge stone trunk, which covered the mortal parts of her mother, sister, and brother. They had been dead for years, but she could remember them all, and sometimes, as she wandered about in the walks of the long garden at the back of the house, between the rows of espaliers, looking vacantly at the York and Lancaster roses, and the Canterbury bells, she used to fancy that

if they—not the roses and the bells, but the above named individuals—had been alive, she should never have been dull. She often wished that, instead of being covered with that monstrous box-ottoman, their grave, with a cross or a circle at the head, had been planted with flowers. It would have been so sweet—quite an object in life—to tend them. But that frightful tomb with the spiked iron-railings all round!

Hannah never looked at it, but the quaintly horrible problem would present itself to her mind, of how its tenants would ever get out on the Resurrection morning. She knew it was a very profane idea, and one that would fill all Goslingford, and more especially her father, with horror and indignation, so she sedulously kept it to herself.

Goslingford was devoted to the box-ottoman and anti-resurrection style of monument, to an extent that, had the orthodoxy of the place not been beyond suspicion, might have led to a suspicion of Sadduceeism, and it despised all mediævalism and innovation, as Puseyite and weak-minded. Crosses and circles, roses and immortelle, might be very well in Père la Chaise,—but in Goslingford churchyard! The sound English common-sense of the place revolted at such frivolity!

And so poor Hannah Brown could find no refuge from the comfortable dreariness of her life in the poetic piety of visiting her dead mother's grave. It was hard. She should have liked so much in some way, at once tangible and beautiful, to have connected herself still with her sweet, sad mother, who had faded away so gently into

the "silent land." Nor had she ever found any break, in the too smooth flowing current of her life, from the rocks and shoals of love affairs—unfortunate or otherwise. At twenty years of age, Hannah Brown had never even had, as far as she knew, so much as the ghost of a lover. It was rather mortifying.

There were not very many eligible beaux in Goslingford, still several of the girls had lovers; and at evening parties all of them had more partners than Hannah Brown.

It was very—very mortifying. Hannah knew that a superior mind would have been above being mortified for such a cause; but she *was* mortified, ergo, she could not have a superior mind. And now what was the cause of this most mortifying fact? Why were Miss Venetia, and Miss Julietta, and Miss Laura Victoria Smith for ever on the

floor, while poor Hannah Brown acted no more prominent part than that of wall-flower? Often—undignifiedly, passionately often, had she asked the question of herself, and asked it even with tears.

Was she uglier than other people? She had stood in front of the old oblong mirror in an ebony frame, which had been nailed lengthwise on the end of her bedroom to supply the place of a cheval glass, and had asked herself this question dozens and dozens of times; and, it might be her vanity, but the plate-glass oracle had never answered “Yes.” She could not see anything repulsive in her young, slender, slightly drooping figure—in her shy brown eyes, nor in her long chestnut ringlets. Nay, these latter she was quite sure *were* pretty. What could it be? What was she to do? Sometimes she thought of

adopting a more showy, flouncy style of dress—like the Miss Smiths; but when it came to the point, somehow Hannah always felt *she* could not go out so. People would laugh at her, and say she was copying the Smiths, and “anything rather than that,” thought Hannah Brown. And besides, surely her own style of dress became her better; and though she scarcely acknowledged it to herself, and doubtless she might be mistaken, she instinctively preferred her own appearance to that of the Miss Smiths.

And now, good reader, I fancy I hear you say: “What a conceited girl!” But before you pass sentence on poor Hannah Brown, think for a moment. You do not mean to tell me that you really think yourself ugly. You do not mean to say, O my lady reader! that you have never

viewed with satisfaction your fair face in that glass which rests on your toilette : or, if per force, candour has compelled you to acknowledge that there are fairer faces than your own, have you not been amply consoled by remarking the symmetry of your figure, and the elegance of your carriage ? or, if your figure had some faults, did you not lay the flattering unction to your soul, that your countenance had an expression, your presence an air, your *tout ensemble*, a “ *je ne sais quoi*,” in fact (you know I don’t set up for originality), which amply atoned for any mere defect of form ? As for you, my gentleman reader, you, of course, being a man, never compromised your dignity by fidgeting over the sit of your necktie, or admiring the exquisite twirl of your moustache. If you have never done any of these things, then

condemn Hannah Brown ; but don't expect me to do the same. Shocking as it may seem, I prefer persons who have a little personal vanity. It makes them so much more agreeable, provided they have a little confidence as well, which poor Hannah Brown had not. Poor Hannah Brown then had failed to solve the problem of her own unattractiveness. It had never struck her that to be interesting, one must be interested.

The company of the Goslingford beaux in general, and their topics of conversation, were generally terribly tedious to poor Hannah. She always fancied that they did not think her worthy of any better conversation. It had not as yet struck her that they might have no better, or that ladies might be found, in tolerably plentiful numbers, who could really be animated and

charmed by what seemed to her so flat and unprofitable.

Hannah was one of those persons who cannot feign. When she was weary she looked weary. I do not praise her for this, and if there be any persons who consider impoliteness a duty, she did not deserve even their commendation. She tried hard to seem lively and interested, but it would not do. It was quite beyond her powers. In spite of herself she looked absent and uninterested. She was generally considered "a good-natured kind of girl—but no fun in her at all." I fear poor Hannah Brown was a *femme incomprise*, though it seems very odd that anybody with such a name—Hannah—and Brown! should be anything so "novel-like." I do not mean new. Oh no, it must be a mistake, there could be no such foreign monster in Goslingford—and that

very ordinary Hannah Brown of all people in the world — Hannah Brown, whom even that zealous Smithite, Miss Richards, praised because she “never flirted.” Ah ! Miss Richards,—

“Things are not what they seem.”

Quiet, sensible Hannah Brown, who never dressed fine, would have had no objection to flirt, as you call flirting, if she could have found an eligible opportunity ; for —

“The lads like lasses,
And the lasses, lads too ”

And were they not meant to do so ?

CHAPTER III.

HANNAH BROWN'S FIRST ADVENTURE.

THE only diversity in the even tenor of Hannah Brown's existence at Goslingford was an occasional expedition to the town of Buttonborough—the same large manufacturing town, illuminated by that seat of every accomplishment (if not of all the sciences), Miss Slater's establishment for young ladies.

Hannah went to Buttonborough to shop,

sometimes accompanied by Miss Clara Wellby, whom, though no relative, she always called "Aunt Clara;" and sometimes alone. When alone she always took an early dinner with old Mrs. Beddoes—a deaf old lady above seventy, who only heard through an ear-trumpet, and who was very fat and sleepy, and always treated Hannah as if she were ten years old. It was on one of those lively occasions in the "leafy month of June," when the days were long, the sun bright, the roads dusty, and the evening breeze still easterly and chill, that Hannah Brown was returning by train from Buttonborough to the Dustwhirl Road Station, whence she was to be conveyed home by the Goslingford omnibus. Hannah had taken a cab, which had carried herself and her purchases to the Great Buttonborough

station, where different trains were starting from various platforms for all points of the compass. There was a great bustle, and Hannah was rather late. She almost feared losing the train, which would have been an awful catastrophe, as she had "promised her father faithfully" (what is *promising* faithfully?) that by that very train she should certainly be home; and she well knew the fuss and anxiety that would pervade the great red house by the church, should she not keep her appointment. In her mind's eye she saw her father with knitted brows, and taking out his watch every instant, pacing up and down the paved alley by the churchyard railings, which led from their house to the main street, muttering as he walked, with an anxious heart and an irritated temper. He would not say much to her, Hannah

knew, but she dreaded beyond everything the frowning face, and the gloomy evening, and the cold "Good night, Hannah," which would end it.

Hannah had all her life been afraid of her father, and yet he was a fond father, and not by any means a bad-tempered man. If she could only have coaxed him a little when he was irritated, all would have been well. But she could not do that, she was too frightened. It was this fear which had all her life weakened her love for him—this fear, coupled with a feeling, only partly acknowledged, that he ought to have done more to make her life pleasant.

"Surely," thought Hannah, "he can never have been young." And there Hannah was right. William Brown never had been young, and he had no sympathy with youth. A strange compound of anti-

quoted prejudices, high moral principles, honourable feelings, strong business sense, intellectual narrowness, formal habits, warm but undemonstrative feelings, and narrow sympathies, he had no more conception of his daughter Hannah than of the man in the moon, if modern enlightenment will permit me the dear old simile of my childhood.

And thus father and daughter lived and loved—yes, loved; for either would have died for the other. But their mutual love added little to the happiness of either. In an economico-affectionate point of view, it was a sheer waste of the precious material, and no “Moral Wealth of Nations” had shown them how it might be turned to account.

Hannah, however, saved the train on the present occasion, tumbling in, head-fore-

most, with her arms full of parcels, just as the carriages began to move and the whistle to shriek, tripping, as she did so, over the legs of a male fellow-passenger, who prevented her further fall by catching her in his arms.

Sensitive Hannah Brown blushed up to her forehead at her own awkwardness, and could scarcely find voice to say—

“I beg your pardon.”

“Oh! pray don't mention it!” said the gentleman addressed, who was young and well-looking, though with a certain air of superciliousness, which was not altogether becoming, and made Hannah Brown feel more vexed still. Or perhaps I was wrong in the term superciliousness. There was too much vanity, and too little pride in it for superciliousness. Will the reader, with a classical taste, and a chaste ear for lan-

guage, permit me to call it patronisingness? Hannah's fellow-traveller looked as if there could be no doubt that he was very superior to the world in general; but as if, at the same time, he was good-humouredly resolved to tolerate and patronise it, and to be amused with, rather than contemptuous of, its inferiority. He might have been a London-bred man, coming down to see his country cousins, and then, of course, the frame of mind I have indicated would have been quite natural. Country cousins always are so inferior in sense, and wit, and knowledge to their London relatives. And then their dress! What can be so outrageously absurd?—though it is the same that was worn in town only last year.

Hannah Brown never spoke to her fellow-passengers in—railway trains, I was

going to have said—but I mean in *the* railway train between Buttonborough and Dustwhirl Road Station, for she had never been in any other. She was not sorry, however, to be spoken to. But this was an event which rarely occurred. Poor Hannah's shyness was generally catching to her companions. There are, however, some individuals whose constitutions are proof against certain diseases, even when exposed to infection in the most unguarded manner. Hannah's present fellow-traveller had an idiosyncrasy of this nature. A female Marlow would not have daunted him, any more than the male one did Miss Hardcastle. Moreover, he had discovered, what the Goslingford beaux had never yet found out, that this country girl had very pretty brown eyes and hair, and it struck him that it would pass the time quite as

quickly to amuse himself with her *naïveté* and shyness, as to go on reading the book with the bright yellow cover, which had hitherto been the not unpleasant companion of his journey. He fancied, too, that the sight of so magnificent a hero as himself might have had something to do with his companion's shyness. He began:—

“Rather a prettyish line this!—very English!”

“Very pretty, and, I daresay, very English; but, as I have never been out of England, I have had no opportunity of judging of it by comparison.”

“Never out of England! I fancied you must have travelled.”

Now, Hannah's sensitiveness and quickness of perception made her instantaneously aware that her companion was indulging in banter, and, feeling a little

angry and very awkward, she said abruptly—

“I have never been anywhere but at Buttonborough, in my life.”

“Never been anywhere but at Buttonborough in your life!” and he looked infinitely amused, but too well-bred absolutely to laugh. “Why, you are the wonder of the age. I might have travelled all over Europe without meeting the one personage who has never been anywhere but at Buttonborough. You are indeed a *rara avis*.”

“Not an avis at all, I assure you,” said Hannah, blushing, and feeling a little indignation, at the same time not blind to the humorous light in which this, to her mortifying fact, might appear to the traveller; “if I had, I should have flown away long ago.”

“Ah! I see you are a chained eagle, or caged swallow. So this is your first railway journey. I hope it is to be as long as you would wish it to be.”

“It is not my first railway journey. I have often been to Buttonborough.”

“I beg your pardon. I thought Buttonborough was your home, and that this very day marked the remarkable era of your first flight from it—the Hegira of Miss Blank from Buttonborough. *Dies cretâ notanda*. You have learned Latin, I perceive.”

“No, never; but I understand these common things, and often a short Latin sentence, without having learnt it.”

“Indeed. You mean, in short, but are too modest to say so, that you are quite a female Mezzofante.”

Hannah blushed and laughed, and yet,

in spite of his banter, she had never felt so much at her ease with a person of his sex before.

“No, no, I don’t mean anything of the sort. You are really too bad.”

Now, Hannah’s companion had fancied that a girl who had never been “anywhere but at Buttonborough,” was not likely to have heard of the celebrated Cardinal-linguist ; but she evidently had. Indeed, she did not seem ignorant, and her manners were lady-like, and our young railway traveller began to feel some little curiosity to know where she did live.

“Buttonborough, then, is not your home. You live in the country, I suppose?”

“No, I live in Goslingford.”

“In Goslingford !” he repeated, in a tone of real surprise, and looking for a minute full in Hannah’s face, but without

any impertinence in the gaze. As he did so, a faint reminiscence, like the memory of a dream, came across her mind, that she had seen that good-looking, good-natured, self-complacent face before. Surely those saucy blue eyes were not altogether unknown to her. But Hannah Brown had never been out of Goslingford, except to go to Buttonborough, and in neither of these places had she ever met in society the person she now saw. Goslingford would not have tolerated the Frenchified cut of his coat, or the glossy curl of his brown moustache, for Goslingford, only a few years ago, held all hirsute facial decorations, except whiskers, in abomination; and there is, to my mind, no more conclusive proof of the amazing velocity of "progress," in these latter days, than that beards, moustachios, and imperials now

abound in that thoroughly English town. There are, however, a few individuals, with Miss Wellby at their head, who persist in considering all that, in their opinion, superfluous hair, a proof, not of the advancement, but of the degeneracy of the times. And when Miss Richards, who naturally takes the unbecoming side of the question, happens to suggest that they are healthy, and keep off consumption, her friend and adversary will reply triumphantly—

“Healthy! Dirty, you mean, Harriet. I am an old-fashioned person, and believe that cleanliness is akin to godliness; but you don’t, I see, so we’ll say no more about it.”

As I have said, then, the moustache was proof positive that Hannah could not have seen her fellow-traveller either at Gosling-

ford, or at Mrs. Beddoes', or anywhere, except in the streets of Buttonborough, and she was yet pondering the possibility of having passed him there, when all at once there was a terrific shock that threw her forward from her seat with astounding violence, a tremendous bumping, an awful rattling, a swaying over of the train, loud cries and shrieks, and the fearful flash of conviction that they were in all the horrors of a railway accident.

Those dread moments were but brief. The train, from some cause or other, had gone off the rails. Providentially, it was neither in a cutting nor on an embankment, but on a plain, with hedges and corn-fields on both sides ; still it was an awful scene, and to this day Hannah Brown recalls, with a shudder and a faintness of the heart, the horror, the sickening anxiety of the

moment, when she knew not what sight might meet her eyes, nor what sad tale her ear.

In the midst of this spectacle of unparalleled confusion, the air yet resounding with cries, and groans, and shouts, Hannah found herself standing up to the waist in green corn beside her late fellow-traveller, the bright June sun pouring down on their pale, scared faces and torn dresses, and on the whole scene of wreck and disorder.

“You are not much hurt, I hope?” he asked, in a tone of interest.

“No. I think not—not at all; but your face is streaming with blood.”

“Is it? A mere scratch from the broken glass;” and he stanchèd it with his pocket-handkerchief.

“I wonder if there are many killed?”

said Hannah, in a low tone, and with blanched lips.

“Shall I go and see? You are not afraid to be left alone for a few minutes?”

“Oh no. I should like to know the worst, or if I can do anything.”

He was a long time in returning—at least it seemed a long time to Hannah. She looked eagerly down the long train of carriages, and saw many taken out; but she was not near enough to see in what condition they were, and she did not like to go herself, lest she should be in the way. She became very lonely and uncomfortable, and longed for the return of her companion. At last he came.

“Good news!” he said, “no one killed, or even in danger. A few broken limbs, and a great many bruises, that is all.”

“Thank heaven,” cried Hannah, fervently. And now that her mind was

relieved upon this point, and that it had overcome the first bewildering shock of the accident, it returned more nearly to its accustomed channels of thought.

“My father!” she cried, “if he should hear of this accident before I return. Oh, what will become of him? How can I go home?”

“A man has walked on to Dustwhirl Road, and the engine has gone back to Buttonborough for help, and to stop the next train. Probably the Goslingford omnibus will come on here, and after it has helped to convey the wounded, it will probably take us home.”

“Oh, that will be so long,” cried Hannah, too much pre-occupied to remark that her companion had spoken of Goslingford as his home too. “I wonder if I could walk to Dustwhirl Road?”

“I cannot see what good end it would answer if you could, and I am sure you cannot in this hot sun, and with your bruises, for you must be bruised, though excitement has hitherto prevented your feeling it.”

Poor Hannah looked so anxious and so distressed that her companion good-naturedly began to think how he could help her

“Stay,” he said, “there is a farmhouse about half a mile from here, and the farmer keeps some sort of vehicle. Perhaps he will lend it to us—shall I go and ask him?”

“Oh, thank you, thank you! How kind you are! You see I am the only one left.”

“Then come here, and wait till I come back.”

And he led her to a quiet corner, near the public road, and got her his carpet-bag, which had been in the carriage with them, to sit on. Hannah found that she could not walk without pain. She felt bruised all over, and her arm especially began to ache violently. She did not complain, however, but sat down on the carpet-bag, to await the young man's return. And as she sat alone and began to think, it struck her for the first time how strange it was that he should be going to Goslingford too. Then she looked at the carpet-bag, to see if there was a name on it, but there was none — neither name nor address, and Hannah mentally resolved that she would carefully conceal this fact from her father, in whose good opinion it would have ruined the young gentleman for ever.

During the three-quarters of an hour which elapsed before his return, Hannah had time to wonder at her own coolness in putting him to so much trouble, and to have worked herself up in consequence into a miserable fit of shyness.

At last, when she had almost begun to despair of ever seeing him again, he appeared with the very shabbiest and dirtiest of dog-carts—drawn by a horse fresh from farm labour—and laughing heartily.

“I can do no better for you, I am sorry to say.”

“Oh, thank you—I am ashamed——”

“Of the carriage?”

“Oh! no, of——”

“My torn coat then?”

“No, of giving you all this trouble.”

“Oh, if that is all you have to be

ashamed of, you are a fortunate person. I was just thinking how lucky you have been altogether. Though you have only been to Buttonborough, you have actually been in a railway accident, and that is what few can say. Why, all the rest of your life you will be quite an authority on the subject of railway accidents."

"Oh, please, don't," said Hannah—"it was so horrible."

"It was," he said gravely, "but it is not good for you to think of it in that way now."

He then began to help her up the awkward step into the high seat.

She gave her left hand.

"My right arm is a little hurt, I think. It seems swollen." And as she spoke she threw back her open sleeve.

It was indeed very much swollen, and

she could not bear it moved. Her companion thought it was broken, and, making a sling of his handkerchief, he placed her arm in it very gently, almost tenderly. Hannah felt that he was very kind, and in spite of her late agitation and the pain she was suffering, would have felt rather happier than usual, had it not been for the thought of her father. But the sweets of life come not unmixed, as the reader has often said, and often heard, and often experienced—the latter always a little to his surprise and chagrin. In short, human life, generally speaking, is either sweet and bitter at once—a kind of moral marmalade, or flavourless, like calves'-foot jelly before the wine and the seasoning have been added.

As soon as they were seated in the farmer's dog-cart, Hannah's companion said politely—

“You must tell me what part of Goslingford I am to drive you to. I have not the pleasure of knowing your name.”

“I live near the Church, and my name is Hannah Brown.”

She would have liked to ask his name too, but this would have been too courageous an effort for Hannah Brown, and he did not tell it, as she expected. He made no rejoinder, but received the information in silence. During the rest of the way, he was very agreeable and kind; but jested no more during the rest of the time—a full hour-and-a-half—that they were together.

CHAPTER IV.

AT HOME IN THE OLD RED HOUSE.

MR. BROWN'S tea-hour was six o'clock, and Hannah was expected home by half-past five, which would be just in time; but half-past five came, and no Hannah. Her father concluded the train was late, or the omnibus slow; nevertheless he laid down the book he was reading (the political article in Blackwood), and began to walk in

the garden. Somehow or other he could not attend to the meaning of what he was reading. It was much easier and more amusing just then to look what promise there was of marrow-fats, and how the nectarines and peaches on the south-wall were coming on. Then Mr. Brown sat down in the moss-house at the end of the middle walk (a long alley formed by espaliers, and bordered by double daisies, at the upper end of which was a sun-dial), and admired the garden in general. And it had a kind of beauty, though Hannah did not like it—at least not at that period of her life;—it was so associated in her mind with long, tedious days, a sinking heart, and a longing, mortified spirit. It had been the garden of Mr. Brown's father and grandfather, and had doubtless been new-fashioned in its time, but that was very

long ago, and now nothing could look more formal and antiquated than its long, straight walks, all at right angles, its lines of espaliers, and its obsolete flowers, to which there was no part of the garden especially assigned, but which mostly formed a narrow border between the espaliers and the gravel walks. Still there was a charm on a sunny summer afternoon in sitting in that old moss-house, inhaling the mingled breath of honeysuckles and cabbage roses, and pinks, and sweet-williams—listening to the hum of insects, and watching the bees flit from flower to flower. Even the Canterbury bells and the London pride had their own homely beauty. A ramble in Mr. Brown's garden was like meeting the long-lost and long-forgotten friends of one's childhood, and awakened a host of sleeping memories.

“What landscapes I read in the primroses’ looks,
And what pictures of pebbled and murmuring brooks,
In the vetches that tangled their shore.”

Something like the feelings which prompted these lines perhaps it was, that made the old Goslingford attorney love so dearly the garden of his childhood, for even in an attorney’s heart there may linger a drop of poetry, though you, fair young lady, in love with the pale, dark-eyed curate, I see, don’t believe it. But, even apart from association, there was real beauty in that old garden, in its old-world quietness and seclusion, in the wealth of rosy fruit basking on the brick walls, in the coolness of the “ivy green” which mantled the back of the tall red house, and in the long shadow of the tapering church-spire, which cut the sunshine as clearly as did the index on the sun-dial.

Mr. William Brown had never heard of Keats, and would most likely have despised both him and his poetry if he had. But that old ancestral garden of his—for Browns, even when attorneys, really have ancestors as well as Capulets—was the very place to experience such thoughts, as no other writer, prosaic or poetical, has so well expressed—

“ And calmest thoughts come round us—as of leaves
 Budding—fruit ripening in stillness—autumn dews
 Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves—
 Sweet Sappho’s cheek—a sleeping infant’s breath—
 The gradual sand that through an hour glass runs—
 A woodland rivulet—a Poet’s death.”

Now, Mr. Brown would doubtless have told you that he had never thought any one of these things in the whole course of his life. Ripening apples were to him suggestive of cider, and Sappho, if he had ever heard of her at all, was associated

in his mind with crabbed Greek characters, and the birch of Dr. Fell.

But thoughts of a certain class are so much akin to feelings, that one can scarcely draw the boundary line. The difference is that the feelings are common, but are only translated, or shaped into thoughts, by the few. Thus, I have no doubt, William Brown, in a vague, unconscious way, experienced feelings akin to those described by the poet, as he sat in the afternoon sunshine, in the old garden where he had played as a child, amid the old familiar scenes where the sand of his hour-glass had run so noiselessly.

But suddenly he was startled from a half-sleeping, half-waking reverie by the old church clock striking the hour of six. Hannah had not come. She must have missed the train. It was intolerable in

Hannah. It was not to be borne. And leaving the garden, he began to walk up and down the paved path leading to the street. It was in vain that the servants offered tea.

“I will have no tea till Miss Brown comes home.”

“The next train, sir, is not till eight o’clock.”

“Then I will have no tea at all. I cannot stand people being late. It is—it is quite unpardonable. She might have stayed as late as she liked, if she had only said so before she went away.”

And Lucy went away, telling her fellow-servants she had never seen anyone so put out at having to wait for his tea. Lucy had a fellow-feeling for people who were late.

“I wonder,” said she, “if he will walk there till eight o’clock.”

As the time passed on, Mr. Brown walked faster and faster, till he was ready to drop down with fatigue, and the more tired he was, he became the more angry and anxious. The only thing that gave him any consolation was the thought of how vexed Hannah would be when she found that he was so tired and had had no tea.

They made another attempt, by bringing him out a cup of tea. But he ordered it away again angrily, though in reality he would have liked to have had it.

Lucy, angry in her turn, suggested—

“But it may not have been Miss Brown’s fault—there may have been an accident.”

“An accident, you fool! Don’t talk such nonsense to me.”

Now the truth of the matter was, it was the dread of an accident which had so much disturbed Mr. Brown, though he would not have acknowledged it even to himself, and he was one of those whom anxiety always makes cross.

“Ill news travels fast.” As the messenger from the train reached Dustwhirl Road there chanced to be a butcher’s boy riding by the station on his way to Goslingford. After having heard the news he rode off at a double pace, and in about an hour afterwards it was all over Goslingford that there had been a dreadful accident to the mail train between Buttonborough and Dustwhirl Road, fifteen people killed, and a great many injured.

Miss Wellby had just sat down to a cup of tea with Miss Richards, when

the parlour-maid came in, open-mouthed, and carrying another buttered tea-cake as an excuse, with the news. It gives people such pleasure, apparently, to tell bad news; and yet Miss Richards' Mary was a kind-hearted girl, and was quite distressed by the accident. But, you see, it gives us a sort of momentary importance to be able to tell anything.

Miss Wellby started from her seat, upsetting her tea.

"Hannah Brown! Hannah Brown went to Buttonborough this morning, and was to come home by this very train. Harriet, I must go to Mr. Brown's this instant. Oh, those trains! How different it was in the good old days of the Buttonborough mail!"

"Trains are, no doubt, very unsafe," said Miss Richards, who had never been

in one in her life, and always travelled in her own carriage; "but, dear Clara, though it is no doubt tempting Providence when we have other means of conveyance, yet those who go in ignorance——"

"Good-bye, Harriet. My gloves, Mary."

"Poor Hannah," said Miss Richards, anxiously; "I hope she had built——"

Then, as her friend was disappearing from the room—

"Mary will run along to your house in half an hour. Poor old Mr. Brown!"

Miss Wellby found her old friend pacing up and down where we left him. That he had not yet heard of the accident was evident. He was rather pleased to see Miss Wellby—she was always so cheerful, and her opinions were so correct.

“There is that girl Hannah,” he said, “young people treated their parents differently in our day, Miss Wellby—you and I did not keep our fathers waiting their meals—not come home by the train as she promised! Most abominable carelessness—quite disgraceful!”

“Come in, my dear sir, and let us have a cup of tea,” said Miss Clara, with as much cheerfulness as she could assume, “we will scold her well when she does come.”

But as Clara spoke, the youngest of Mr. Brown’s articled clerks, whose business it was to fetch the letters, came up in breathless haste.

“Letters not come, sir—accident to the mail-train between Buttonborough and Dustwhirl—sixteen killed they say.”

He stopped short, and neither the clerk

nor Miss Wellby ever forgot poor old Brown's low cry of anguish, or his pale, stricken countenance.

"My child!—my Hannah!" Then, turning fiercely to the lad, "Go, boy, this instant to the Queen's Head, and order a fly and pair—their best horses—any money for them—quick! I must go and look for my child. She was my last " and his lip quivered.

"My dear Mr. Brown," and poor Clara, as she spoke, was agitated and weeping, "there are hundreds, you know, in a train, and Hannah was first-class, and that is so much safer."

"Don't talk to me, Clara. You are not a father. What can you know?" Then in a softer tone—"Clara, do you think there is *any* chance of her having missed the train?" And the poor old man would

have given all his fortune that his daughter should have done the very thing which, only a minute before, he had been so angry at the idea of her doing.

They were now at the end of the alley which led from Mr. Brown's house to one of the four main streets of Goslingford. Here he began to fume for the fly, long before the horses could possibly have been harnessed, while Clara comforted, expostulated, sympathised, and kept saying, for Miss Wellby could never be silent, that—

“These things could not have happened in the days of the Buttonborough Mail.”

Just as Mr. Brown's impatience was getting beyond all bounds, the jingle of a conveyance was heard in the distance.

“The fly at last!” cried Miss Wellby.

“Fly!—nonsense! There it comes,

—a farmer's trap! Oh, Hannah!" and he turned away in a frenzy of anxiety and impatience."

But hark! The trap pulled up—Clara gave a scream of delight—Mr. Brown turned, and there was a gentleman lifting Hannah down from the vehicle.

In another moment she was in her father's arms, and they were mingling together their sobs and tears. For the first time Hannah guessed how much her father loved her.

"You must thank this gentleman, father. He got the trap for me, and did everything, or I should not have been home for hours."

"I do thank him; and may I ask to whom I am so much indebted?"

Hannah's companion had, in the meantime, been talking to Miss Wellby.

"He has been in such a state," the lady

said; "but won't your father and mother be anxious?"

"No, they do not expect me till the next train. Had not I better send Mr. Splint, as I go home? I fear Miss Brown's arm is broken!"

The young man now turned, as Mr. Brown addressed him, and Hannah remarked, for an instant, a peculiar, rather puzzled expression in his face; but it quickly passed. With much self-possession and politeness he took his card-case from his pocket, and presented his card to Mr. Brown. On the card was engraved the name:—

"Mr. Edgar Smith."

Mr. Brown was self-possessed too, but all his old reserve returned. He thanked Mr. Edgar Smith again—more pointedly than before. Then they bowed, and the

young man went away, with a low, but doubtful reverence to Hannah.

As they returned to the house, Miss Wellby remarked—

“I never saw anybody so changed as Edgar Smith, but five years is a long time at his age. How ridiculous his moustache looks ! I have no patience with such foreign airs, though he seems a nice enough young man, too. But all the Smiths are so—so——”

CHAPTER V.

EDGAR SMITH'S OPINIONS.

IT was the morning after the accident. The Smith family were at breakfast, or, at least, such of them as had come down stairs, for the Smiths in general, and the Miss Smiths in particular were not famous either for punctuality or early rising. They had, however, exerted themselves a little more than usual this morning, as they were all eager to renew their over-

night's conversation with their brother, and to hear more about the accident.

The Smith dining-room was probably as handsome as that of any Montague in Verona, though, to confess the truth, it had nothing in the least ancestral about it, except a rather vulgar portrait of grandfather Smith, representing a stout, florid, middle-aged gentleman, with a powdered wig and pigtail, dressed in a white waistcoat and blue coat with brass buttons. In short, the whole aspect of Tudor Lodge was undeniably modern, or, to speak plainly, bran-new—an aspect which, to some minds, is as objectionable in a residence as in a coat. Of a bran-new pattern was the silver teapot, the porcelain cups, the tapestry carpet, the rep curtains ; bran-new the deep oriel window, the smooth-shaven, shadeless lawn, the bright

flower-beds, and the rustic seats. Mr. Edgar Smith was seated next his mother. She looked proud and pleased, and was quite ready to fly at any prejudiced Goslingford ignoramus who should object to the moustache. This lady was of rather a pugnacious disposition, when the entire perfection of any member of her family was, or seemed to be, questioned.

“And so you drove Hannah Brown”—with a slightly contemptuous accent on the name—“home. How very good-natured in you, considering the way in which they have always treated your father, and indeed all our family !”

“Well, but, my dear mother,” said Edgar, with an air of amusement at his mother’s partisanship, “but you know we should return good for evil, at least, you always taught me so when I was a little boy.”

“My dear child!” with tender admiration ; then, more briskly : “It is sad to think how different these Browns are—all ‘the Church, the Church’—but, I fear very little Christianity.”

“But I am sure Miss Brown never did any of us any harm, nor would do it, if it was in her power.”

“No,” said Miss Venetia Smith, a tall, handsome girl, with blue eyes, and very fashionably-made dress, who could never, under any circumstances, have passed unnoticed ; “I should not think she had the wit to do us any harm, even if she wished it, poor, stupid, little thing!”

“Stupid, Venetia ? ” cried her brother. “I differ from you entirely. I consider Hannah Brown very clever, and very lady-like, not to say pretty.”

Having pronounced this opinion in his

usual *ex cathedrâ* tone, Edgar leant back in his chair, amused and pleased at the consternation and surprise painted on the faces of his mother and sisters. It was the little revenge in which he indulged himself for their contempt of Hannah Brown.

Now, it was an established axiom with all the ladies of the Smith family that in matters of taste their brother's opinion could not err. But his present dictum sounded so heterodox to all preconceived Smithian notions, that faint murmurs, even of dissent, were heard. Poor Mrs. Smith was between the horns of a dilemma, being called upon either to doubt the infallibility of her son, or to believe that a Brown might possess merits.

Miss Laura Victoria Smith, was the first to begin to come round. She was

the youngest sister, and her brother's favourite, being a rosy, sweet-tempered, plump-faced girl, her chief claims to beauty consisting in a good complexion and good teeth.

"Miss Wellby always said she was clever, and certainly her hair is very beautiful. But, somehow, it is not the fashion in Goslingford to admire her."

"Then I will make it the fashion," said Edgar, loftily.

Mrs. Smith felt that it was perhaps better not any longer to continue a direct attack on Hannah Brown. She contented herself with saying—

"What a disgraceful thing in old Brown, with such a fortune as his, and only one daughter, not to have given her greater educational advantages! He can have no affection for her."

“If you had seen him last night, you would not have said so. Poor old fellow! He was stiff enough to me, but, from all I saw, I should think the reason he did not send Hannah to school, was because he could not part with her.”

“How very selfish, and what monstrous ingratitude to be stiff to you after what you had done! It will teach you to do anything for the Browns another time.”

“I thought, mother, we were to love our enemies, and——”

“We must take care how we love them too well though, Edgar, my boy,” said his father, who had hitherto seemed entirely absorbed in discussing some ham and boiled eggs.

Edgar coloured slightly, but immediately recovering his self-possession, laughed, and said—

“Not much danger of that, I think, sir.”

But though Mr. Smith had not spoken before, he had been listening to all that had passed. Now, Mr. Smith was a clever man—a man whose mind at once embraced the bearings of most things—a quality which had made him a good lawyer. He was also really an affectionate father, and like most men who have made money, he was by no means indifferent to the glittering dross—the world said he was fond of it. He had never wished to quarrel with old Brown. It was old Brown who had insisted on quarrelling with him—most unreasonably. Was there any lawyer who would not take all the respectable business he could get?—and if some of old Brown’s clients had come over to him, was he going to refuse them?

Or, rather, with his family, was it not his duty to get as much business as he could? It was all well enough for a man to indulge in professional Quixotism when he had only one daughter, though even then Mr. Smith was not sure that it was right. A man who did so would never be the best man of business. Still he never had felt more than temporary irritation at old Brown. His conscience was quite clear upon that point. But a complete reconciliation would be more Christian, and a better example in the eye of the world; and if Edgar should take a fancy to Hannah Brown, why, it would not much signify then who had the business.

With Edgar's last words the breakfast-party broke up. Mr. Smith never jested again on the subject, and it had never

occurred to the ladies, in spite of what Edgar had said, that there could be anything to jest about.

Julietta remarked to Venetia that Edgar certainly did take a pride in thinking differently from everybody else; and as for Mrs. Smith, it never entered into her head that her son would think of a flirtation with Hannah Brown, even though he had the unaccountable taste to admire her. Was she not a Brown?

CHAPTER VI.

FURTHER HETERODOXY ON THE PART OF
MR. EDGAR SMITH.

HANNAH BROWN'S arm was broken. It was, however, a simple fracture, and Mr. Splint said would soon be well if she took care of it. She was ordered, however, to keep her room for a few days, as her bruises were somewhat painful, and quietness was good for her. During these few days, as in all her past illnesses

since her mother's death, Miss Clara Wellby was her constant visitor. She made sundry little sick dishes for her, which nobody but herself could make, and which always turned out quite different when anybody else attempted them.

“I always make this apple-tea for poor Harriet Richards when she has these influenza colds. Would you believe it, Hannah, with all her money, and the ridiculous wages she gives her cook, she cannot get a decent batter-pudding—though, to be sure, very few people can make one. It should have flour enough, and not too much, and— How can you be so silly, Hannah, as to move your arm? You would have been much more comfortable if you had lain in the position I recommended; and the idea of your

stretching out yourself for that glass! Did not I come here to help you?"

Miss Wellby was often a little put out, for placidity of disposition was not among her virtues, and she sometimes wearied her patients by doing too much for them, and by thinking that she understood their comforts much better than they did themselves. She spent the greater part of her life in endeavouring to make others happy, and occasionally felt it somewhat ungrateful that her efforts were not always attended with success. People were so obstinately fond of their own way—even of being happy. Poor Clara had met with a great deal of perversity of this kind in her life, and it spoke well for her natural philanthropy, or her Christian charity, that it had no effect in making her relax her benevolent labours.

There was nothing Miss Wellby hated so much as conceit. She thought it a positive duty to make people think as little of themselves as possible—more especially Harriet Richards. The Smith family, too, required to be taken down; but Hannah Brown was not conceited, except in thinking that she knew how to manage her father's house without the constant suggestions of Miss Wellby's long experience. Personally, however, Hannah was not conceited, so that Miss Wellby, in those ungarded moments we all have when we say things that we ought not to have said, would occasionally repeat or originate something complimentary, and the more especially if it afforded her the luxury of contradiction, of which she was rather fond.

“If you go on in this way, Hannah,

stretching out for your barley-water yourself, and sitting with your arm in that position, you will not be able to drink tea at Miss Richards's next week, not to say that you may disfigure yourself for life."

Now, Hannah, at that moment, felt very low. She had been excited all the day after the accident; but now the reaction had come, and, though she was touched by Miss Wellby's kindness, it had somewhat worn her out. She answered, wearily—

"I am sure I don't much care. Miss Richards's parties are generally dull."

"Dull!" cried Clara, who had given utterance to the same sentiment dozens of times herself. "I am sure poor Harriet does her best to make everybody happy; but young people now-a-days must have excitement."

“Well, Aunt Clara, I daresay the dullness is in myself.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Hannah. There is Edgar Smith says you are both clever and pretty.”

A moment ago, life had seemed to Hannah Brown very dull and cheerless. Now, all at once, the sun broke out, the birds sang, the flowers blossomed. It was very undignified in Hannah Brown, no doubt, but then she was only an attorney’s daughter, and one could not expect her to feel as if she had

———“that repose

Which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.”

For sympathy and allowance, I must, therefore, appeal to those who partake of mere common human nature—the more especially as Hannah had not even the apology of being in love. But, excusable

or not, she now felt that she could very well endure, if not enjoy, Aunt Clara's company. No sooner, however, had the speech, which had been such a draught of champagne to poor Hannah's spirits, passed Miss Wellby's lips, than she repented of it, and added—

“But they say Edgar Smith is always eccentric in his opinions, and likes to say things different from other people. The Smiths, we all know, Hannah, have not the best taste in the world.”

But Hannah, with all her sensitiveness, and all her mortifying experiences, could not be put down just then. She had been thought clever and pretty, and she argued that what had been the opinion of one person, might possibly be the opinion of more than one. She was anxious now to be well enough to go to Miss Richards's tea-party.

She would have liked to know if any of the Smiths were to be there, but she did not like to ask Miss Wellby in direct terms. She had very rarely, except at large parties, been asked to meet the Smiths anywhere (her father never), but Miss Richards was very intimate with them, for as Mr. Brown had caustically remarked, "You might be sure that Thomas Smith would be intimate with anybody who was rich." So Hannah merely asked if it was to be a large party at Miss Richards's.

But Clara was not in the humour to know anything about it; and after having wrapped Hannah's feet in a shawl, shaken her pillows, strained her barley-water, kissed her, and scolded her again for sundry misdemeanours, she took leave.

But to cheer Hannah's solitude, came the remembrance of the fact that Edgar

Smith had said she was pretty and clever.

The Smiths were to be at the party, at least they had been invited, rather to the general dismay of the family, for there was no concealing the fact that Miss Richards's parties were dreadfully dull.

"Of course," said Venetia, "we need not all go, three will be quite enough—Mamma, and Edgar, and one of us."

"Edgar is much obliged to you," said her brother, "but begs to be excused, not being very fond either of tea or twaddle."

"You must go, Edgar," said his father. "I should not wonder if the party were given on your account. Miss Richards is an excellent woman, and one of our best clients."

"Are you going, sir? I should think Miss Richards would be disappointed if you did not."

"I shall drop in about supper-time, to bring your mother home. I have business in the earlier part of the evening."

"Cannot I do it for you? The young, you know, should work, and I should be so happy."

A scarcely perceptible smile relaxed the countenance of Mr. Smith, senior.

"No, I must do it myself. It is absolutely necessary."

"Then I am very much afraid," said Edgar, "there is some danger of my being taken ill on Thursday week, with headache or toothache, or something of that kind."

"No, no," said his father, quite good-humouredly, but with considerable determination. "I will hear of no such nonsense, we must all do tiresome things occasionally."

"And I am sure," said Mrs. Smith, "no

one ought to feel it tiresome to drink tea with Miss Richards — such an excellent Christian woman — and though she is a churchwoman, so entirely without sectarian feelings.”

“She is certainly sufficiently without taste, to have been a dissenter.”

“Taste, my love!” said his mother, “I like good taste, and I hope,” looking round the handsome drawing-room, “I am not very deficient in that way; but what has taste to do with religion?”

“Very little with our religion, certainly, mother. Even Mr. Spurgeon, though he has plenty of humour, has no taste,” said Edgar, with an uncomfortable reminiscence of the long hot hours he had spent in a square brick building like a Brodignagian work-box, listening to discourses which he had tried in vain to think were as eloquent

as well-written, or as convincing as those of the Rector, on the rare occasions on which he had been permitted to hear that gentleman.

“Edgar!” said his father, with an absolute frown, a rare thing on the face of Mr. Thomas Smith, who was really a good-tempered man. Edgar made no answer. He had had his little bit of revenge for being forced to accept Miss Richards’s invitation, and was contented with his triumph. His sisters said nothing. They dared not, for their very lives, have supported their brother, but, privately, they admired his hardihood. It is a trite saying, that there is a crook in every lot. Few people had a happier lot than the Miss Smiths, and, wonderful to relate, they thought so themselves. They were young, they were handsome, they were

fashionable, they were clever, they were accomplished, they were admired; and to the full, they believed in and enjoyed their advantages. But even they had their crook in the lot. And this was, that they were chapel people. The Miss Smiths felt deeply that they were the only very genteel people in Goslingford who went to chapel. Gentility was with them a passion, and they could not but feel that this chapel-going was derogatory to it. Then their pastor, the Rev. Josiah Winter, had married a butcher's daughter, and they were painfully aware that their minister and his wife were no associates for them. They—Mr. and Mrs. Winter—were occasionally asked to Tudor Lodge to dinner, but never with a party. At least, Mrs. Winter was never invited with a party. These entertainments to the Winters were dismal occa-

sions for all concerned. A kind of falsetto tone of familiarity and friendliness, compared with which the formality of the most formal party was ease and unconstraint, pervaded the evening. It could not but make Mrs. Winter sour to know that Mrs. Greenfield, the rector's wife, and Miss Wellby, the late rector's daughter, were asked to all the Smiths' best parties, while she only came to family dinners; but, of course, as Mr. Smith was her husband's chief supporter in Goslingford, and, substantially, their best friend, they had both to swallow down their indignation, as those must generally do who depend for their daily bread on the *aura popularis*.

Edgar did not care for the matter in the gentility point of view so much as his sisters. Of course everything he did was genteel. But Mr. Greenfield was a

good preacher, a good man, a gentleman, a scholar, and dared to give utterance to the truth as he saw it. Then Edgar Smith admired and loved the Church—that is, the material building—itself. It had always been a weakness of this young man that he was fond of differing from other people. He piqued himself on seeing with his own eyes, and so he early astonished his father and mother, and, indeed, all Goslingford in general, with the opinion that Gothic was the only architecture proper for a church, and that there was nothing popish in a pointed arch, except the letter P. The church people of Goslingford, the reader must know, though very staunch, understood the architectural merits of their church very little better than the dissenters—having only a sort of dim notion that

there was something dissenting in a square church, and something orthodox in a chancel. It had sometimes dawned on Edgar Smith too—the doctrine he heard in the church being so exactly the same as that in the chapel—that it was hardly worth while to make all this fuss and separation, for the mere pleasure of indulging in a taste for hideousness—the only real mark of distinction he could see between the church people and the orthodox dissenters. Indeed, there were some churches, as well as church people, so entirely devoid of that taste, which, Mrs. Smith had remarked, was no part of religion, that even the general beauty and decorum of the religion by law established need have been no objection.

Once when the Winters were dining at Tudor Lodge, as Mr. Winter and Mr.

Smith were discussing over their port the merits of the voluntary system, Edgar inquired suddenly, "if it would not be better to have everything on the voluntary system—prisons, for instance, and reformatories. Let those who wanted them subscribe for them."

Mr. Winter laughed grimly.

"But, Mr. Edgar, the very people who do want reformatories are those who will not subscribe."

"Oh, I see. And it is exactly the contrary then with religion. The very people who are without it are the most anxious to build chapels and maintain ministers."

Mr. Winter coloured up to the very roots of his long black hair, and Mr. Smith glanced at his son with angry reproof.

A slight mischievous smile played round the young man's lips as he leant back in his chair with an air of what Mr. Winter privately stigmatised as "intolerable conceit," but which Edgar himself meant for innocent unconsciousness. He certainly thought himself a very clever young man, and we will charitably hope he was not altogether mistaken.

The morning after the discussion upon Miss Richards' tea-party, Edgar gave great pleasure and astonishment to the whole family by announcing at breakfast that he intended, if he could spare as much time from the office, to call on Miss Richards that very day.

"I shall see that you have time," said his father, much pleased; "Miss Richards will be very glad to see you. Attention from our sex is always valued by un-

married women a little up in life, and particularly from young men. Who knows but she may put you down in her will for a few thousands?"

"I assure you, sir, that is not my object in calling; and if I thought Miss Richards or anybody else would think it was——"

"Now, Edgar, don't be a fool. Miss Richards has no relations, and if she should take a fancy to you she is wronging nobody."

"Very well, sir—if she should take a fancy to me I cannot help it; but you really must not expect me to toady to Miss Richards, who, though a very respectable, excellent woman, is not exactly the companion I should find congenial."

Mr. Smith wisely said no more. As he remarked to his wife afterwards, Edgar, if

left to himself, would be much more likely to do what was proper than if they gave him advice. "I never saw a young man so fond of his own opinion, nor so jealous of being interfered with. Opposition always drives him at once into a confirmed determination to take his own way. And yet he is not a bad boy either."

"A bad boy, my dear! We are very well off, and ought to be thankful to Providence who has given us such a son. In my opinion what you think self-will is only a joke. He is a most affectionate son. I am sure Miss Richards will not see such another young man in Goslingford."

"I am afraid she won't like his moustache."

"Then she is a very foolish and pre-

judiced woman. I am sure it is excessively becoming. And poor dear Miss Richards, you know, is no authority in matters of taste. Her notions about dress are quite exploded now among religious people."

But to return to Edgar. It had struck that astute youth that as he must go to Miss Richards' party, it would be as well not only to do it with a good grace, but to leave no stone unturned to make the evening as agreeable as possible. He therefore set out to call on that good simple soul with a diplomatic end in view. Edgar Smith, though a conceited youth (and we all know that truly great minds are never conceited—*vide* Socrates, Sir Isaac Newton, &c.), was not without the heroic quality of being able to make the best of things as they are, and could turn even his misfortunes to account.

After having made himself very agreeable to Miss Richards, and caused her little twigs of grey hair to stand on end with his account of the accident, the opening he hoped for presented itself. Miss Richards trusted she was to have the pleasure of seeing him at tea.

“Certainly. He was looking forward to it;”—he did not say with pleasure, my truth-loving reader. “Was it to be a large party?”

“Oh, no! only Miss Wellby, and a few other friends.”

“Was Miss Brown to be one of the party?”

“N-no. I think not,” said Harriet. “I thought of asking her, she is such a nice, modest young person; but, in fact, I was not sure whether your father and mother”—and poor Harriet coloured painfully.

“Would like it, you mean. I am certain they would have no objection. Family feuds are very foolish and unchristian.”

“I am delighted to hear you say so, Mr. Edgar. I will ask Hannah at once; and I am sure, if I could contribute, in any way, to so excellent an object, as to effect a reconciliation between the families, I should be happy. I always felt sure so good a man as your father could not be to blame. But what could one expect from poor Mr. Brown, after his calling that sweet book, ‘Shrieks from the Depths,’ rubbish. You have read it, Mr. Edgar? Shall I lend it to you?”

Edgar had not read it, and he received from good Miss Harriet, somewhat unwillingly, a little blue volume, of which, on opening it at random, a marked feature

seemed to be innumerable notes of exclamation, and a profusion of capital letters. It did strike Edgar Smith that it was rather a pity that religious writers should imitate the style of a newspaper advertisement, as if they meant to puff off the Kingdom of Heaven. He did not, however, express this sentiment to Miss Richards, but took leave, well satisfied that he had gained the object of his visit.

The next day Miss Richards told her friend Clara, that she had had a visit from young Edgar Smith, and how very much she was pleased with him, and with his evident wish for a reconciliation with the Browns.

Clara listened, somewhat impatiently, to the whole recital, and then broke out—

“ Well, Harriet!—you are the very greenest goose! What will not the Smiths—and, indeed, your set of pious people in general—do for money? ”

“ I do not understand you, Clara; and you are very unjust.”

“ Well, Harriet, perhaps I am to you. I do believe, with all your wealth, you are not fond of money; but,” she added, relapsing into her usual jesting, random manner, “ the exception, you know, proves the rule. And now I must think over this affair of the Browns and the Smiths. Mr. Smith has too often behaved in an ungentlemanly, sharp kind of way to Mr. Brown, for my dear old friend to get over it. Though he is a lawyer, Mr. Brown has as keen a sense of honour as if he had been—a—a knight of the Round Table.”

“I don’t know anything about the Round Table. I don’t see much difference between fiction and lies, and I think it would be more for Mr. Brown’s happiness if he had the spirit of a Christian, and could forgive his brother what he has against him.”

“Well, so he does, Harriet. If a thief were to pick my pocket, I would forgive him, but I would not shake hands with him; and say, ‘My dear sir, I am glad of this opportunity of making your acquaintance.’ Would you?”

And so Clara came off, as usual, with flying colours.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS RICHARDS' TEA-PARTY.

HANNAH BROWN'S general health had quite recovered its ordinary tone before the day of Miss Richards' tea-party. Her arm was still in a sling, but Mr. Splint said it would soon be quite well. It was a fine evening late in June, so that Hannah and Miss Wellby, who were to go together, decided on walking. Hannah did look very nice, Miss Clara thought,

in her delicate silk dress, made with the plainness and simplicity which always characterised all she wore, and the fine lace collar, fastened by the brooch which contained her mother's hair. A little more of decided fashion, Miss Wellby might, perhaps, have preferred, still she acknowledged Hannah was very ladylike, and her hair beautiful. There was a brighter colour rather than usual in her cheek, and in her shy eyes a look of expectation, a rare thing with Hannah Brown, who seldom expected anything. As they reached Miss Richards' house, she became even more nervous than she usually was when she went to a party. She wished Miss Clara had not told her what Edgar Smith had said of her, and she felt certain that, if she should meet him again, he would change his mind.

Miss Wellby and Hannah were the first arrivals. They found Miss Richards in her drawing-room—a room which was only used on state occasions. It was not a large apartment, but the furniture in it seemed all to have been intended for a room forty feet long. The ugly pile carpet, the cumbersome walnut-wood chairs and tables, the dark-coloured, lavishly gilt paper, the heavy cornices and rich, gloomy curtains, were almost smothering in a room about eighteen feet by fourteen. Miss Wellby immediately began to pull the furniture about, declaring that the formality of its arrangement was quite enough to prevent them all opening their lips. She was yet engaged in this occupation, when Miss Splint and Miss Westcote arrived. Miss Westcote was the belle of Goslingford—a fair-skinned girl, with a good deal of colour, large, unmeaning blue

eyes, and a self-satisfied simper. She had been finished at Miss Slater's, as her framed chalk-drawing of a baby's head with a swollen cheek, and a very large vase of potichomanie,—not to mention a pyramid of wax fruit under a glass case,—abundantly testified. Miss Westcote's mother was a native of Goslingford, and the widow of a Buttonborough manufacturer. At her husband's death, Mrs. Westcote had returned to her native place, with her little girl and a few thousand pounds. Miss Westcote was not thought by the Goslingford public to have the style and fashion of the Miss Smiths—an opinion which it generally delivered in a tone of commendation as far as regarded Miss Westcote—but she was considered prettier; and as there were so many of the Smiths, she was likely to have more money. It was the fashion, in short, to

laud Mary Westcote up to the skies, and often at the expense of the Miss Smiths (no one ever thought of poor Hannah Brown as a rival to anybody), yet, somehow or other, the Miss Smiths always secured the lion's share of attention. Mary Westcote bore this better than could have been expected. In fact, both she and her mother felt that Mr. Edgar Smith was coming home. He could not devote himself to his own sisters, and he was undoubtedly the great matrimonial prize of Goslingford. Miss Westcote had met Mr. Edgar Smith in the street since his return, and had secretly formed an opinion that his moustache was very becoming. She took good care, however, not to say so to any one, as, in the days of which I write, not even the distant murmur of the advancing wave of the great moustache and beard movement had broken

as yet on the Goslingford ear, and nothing was esteemed more heterodox than to admire these natural ornaments. They were thought "foreign," and the Goslingford public yet rejoiced unfeignedly in the sturdy English belief that "foreign" and "contemptible" were quite convertible adjectives. But Miss Westcote, who was an original thinker, if not as far as moustaches in general, but at least as far as this moustache in particular, was concerned, sat awaiting the arrival of its owner with much complacency. Was not she the belle of Goslingford? Had not her handsome-worked muslin dress been made at Buttonborough at Paris House? And was not Mr. Edgar Smith a person of unexceptionable taste? It had never struck Miss Westcote that taste could reach beyond dress and appearance. Perhaps she did not know there was anything beyond.

The Smiths were always late—much to the grievance of Miss Richards; and all the rest of the party had arrived before them. Among these were Mr. Greenfield, the rector, and his eldest daughter. Mr. Greenfield was a man much liked in his parish. He was a man beyond middle age, white-haired, blue-eyed, stout, handsome, florid—pious enough and strict enough to please Miss Richards, cheerful and hard-working enough to make Miss Wellby pardon him for occasionally going on missionary tours, and declining to play a rubber at whist. Privately, the dissenters did not quite like him, because he had thinned the chapels; but they could not find anything to say against him, as neither by word nor deed had he ever in any way set himself in direct opposition to them. At first this had given umbrage to

Mr. Brown, Miss Wellby, and their party; and Miss Clara, who had always courage equal to the occasion, attacked Mr Greenfield for his want of churchmanship. He stoutly denied the charge.

“We have two enemies to oppose,” said he, “sin and schism; but as I believe schism to be a mere offshoot of sin, I think it best to attack the enemy at head-quarters. Depend upon it, Miss Wellby, when there is no sin, there will be no schism.”

And years after, when Miss Wellby was congratulating him on the accession of a whole family to the church-communion, he said, “You see, Miss Wellby, I have not been such a bad churchman after all.”

Miss Wellby did not like Miss Greenfield so well as her father, or her mother,

who was a gentle invalid, or her younger brothers and sisters, who mostly inherited the genial temper, if not the talents or the devotedness, of their father. Miss Greenfield was a strong-minded young woman, about thirty, who worked, and taught, and visited like two curates in one, and was much more loved by the poor than by the rich, who thought her dictatorial. Miss Wellby, however, always treated Miss Greenfield very politely. She did not argue with or laugh at her, as at Miss Richards, for whom in her heart she had a tenderness greater than for any other human being. She frequently abused Miss Greenfield to Harriet, who always maintained that she was the most "devoted Christian" in the parish. After a long argument, Clara would sometimes conclude,—

“Well Harriet,—one thing I will allow in praise of Eliza Greenfield. She has not published a book yet about her own doings. In the good old days we used to be taught not to sound a trumpet before us; but now-a-days your almsgivers, and your missionary ladies, have all a printer coming up at their heels.”

But I have kept the reader waiting long enough for the appearance of the Smiths—not longer, however, than they kept Miss Richards and the rest of her guests.

Mrs. Smith, Miss Laura Victoria, and Mr. Edgar Smith were the representatives of the family, on the present occasion. There were at least two female hearts present not altogether unmoved by the presence of the young gentleman—which, if he could have known him-

self, he would not have been in the least surprised at, as a very low opinion of his own attractions was by no means one of his merits. And yet I do not myself think that Edgar Smith was of so haughty a mind as many other people,—as some, even, who are considered humble. He could pardon affronts to his vanity, and he felt no mortification in acknowledging superiority when he met with it.

You don't think so very much of this, my dear reader, with the mind at once humble and lofty. I am sorry for it, because, with all his faults and weaknesses, I wished you to give my hero—yes, Smith, attorney of Goslingford, is my hero—some credit for magnanimity; and magnanimity, dear reader, though it does exist, is not common,

perhaps the most uncommon of all the virtues.

Edgar Smith was very fond of Mr. Greenfield. Most intelligent young men were, for, though above sixty, Mr. Greenfield had all the freshness and much of the enthusiasm of youth still. His sympathies with the young perhaps stronger even than with those of his own standing. Now, as soon, therefore, as Edgar saw that Mr. Greenfield was of the party, and that he was standing in a window a little apart, and very accessible, he joined him, first shaking hands with Miss Richards, and bowing inclusively to the rest of the party,—a movement which was no little disappointment to Miss Westcote, who confidently expected he would have come to her. Hannah Brown was not disappointed, for she had not exactly expected

anything. She only experienced a rather deeper and fresher pang of the dull old pain,—the mortified feeling that nobody thought her worth paying any attention to.

But tea was now on the table, and Miss Harriet was seated behind the heavy silver urn, with the china before her—the only wonder of which was, that Colebrook Dale had ever produced anything so ugly. The strongest of tea, the richest of cake, the thickest of cream plentifully supplied the table; and two neat, quakerish-looking maid-servants stood with silver trays, ready to convey the sleep-destroying beverage and the indigestible viands round to the ladies, as soon as Mr. Greenfield should have said grace. And then Mr. Edgar Smith bestirred himself to be polite, and ere

anyone was aware of his intention, he was standing beside Hannah Brown.

“I am delighted to see you able to be here, Miss Brown, and to have heard from Mr. Greenfield that your arm is so much better. Allow me to fetch you tea, and to act as your left hand. I can hold your cup and saucer while you use the other to drink it.”

“Oh, thank you, but——”

“I can sit on that stool at your feet, and then the cup will be just at the height convenient for you to reach.”

Mr. Edgar Smith sitting, in the face of Goslingford and Miss Harriet Richards, at the feet of Hannah Brown, who never flirted! Oh, ye old maids of Goslingford! Could ye have outlived such a spectacle? Hannah coloured all over her face and throat with mingled terror and shyness.

“Oh, no, Mr. Smith, I could not—you must not, indeed.”

Edgar Smith laughed heartily. He knew just as well as Hannah the sensation such a proceeding would have produced, but he would have liked nothing better. He did not wish to annoy her however, and he read her feelings at a glance.

“Well, if the prejudices of society, or your own prejudices, are against me,” he added, a little more gravely, “let me set a chair for you at the table.”

“Do, Hannah, dear,” cried Miss Richards from behind the tea-urn, “come and sit at the table. Here is a nice quiet place just beside me.”

And Edgar Smith, as Hannah rose to obey the summons, followed her with a chair, and placed it not—exactly in the spot indicated by Miss Richards, but where

there was room for himself to stand near her.

The surprise and just indignation of Miss Westcote may be imagined. Surely it must be some great mistake. She had always heard that Edgar Smith prided himself upon thinking differently from other people ; but to go and devote himself to Hannah Brown, whom nobody ever thought of admiring, and considering the terms the families were on, it really was a freak, and a most provoking freak, considering the new dress from Buttonborough ! Mrs. Smith, in her heart, sympathised with Miss Westcote, but if any one had ventured to impugn her son's taste, she would, of course, have taken his part, even though it involved approbation of Hannah Brown. As for Hannah herself, the novel position of being singled

out for attention was not quite so agreeable as she had fancied. It made her feel awkward. She fancied everybody was looking at her, to see how she bore it; and then her arm was in a sling! But after tea was over, it was more comfortable. Edgar sat down a little behind her, where he was not so conspicuous, and they fell into a pleasant conversation, so that Hannah forgot her own personality, and became unconscious and at ease.

Hannah had read about most places, but in her limited range of society she had hardly met anyone before who had lived abroad, and Edgar's lively sketches of Bonn, where he had been at college,—his rather humorous and somewhat exaggerated descriptions of Rhine tourists,—and his little pictures of Alpine scenery, made Hannah long and laugh by turns. Edgar

was really doing his best to please, and he was neither too nervous nor too confident for success. Hannah's freshness and *naïveté*, united with her evident intelligence, were just what interested, and, perhaps, a little flattered him. He thought what a pleasant thing it would be to show her all these things, and to watch her enjoyment of them. She had had such a dull life! How pleasant it would be to brighten it!

At last Hannah began to awaken to a consciousness that their conversation had been very long, and to feel again a little uncomfortable. Hesitating for a second or two, she said:—

“I wonder what Miss Wellby is talking about so energetically to Mr. Greenfield?”

“You mean you would like to go and hear. I must not engross you all the evening,

Miss Brown, I know.” Hannah coloured as she passed, but Edgar Smith remarked, within himself, that her *naïveté* was not without a mixture of dignity. He now betook himself to the hitherto neglected Miss Westcote, whose ruffled plumage began to smooth as she saw him approach, and the more especially as he addressed her with a compliment, which she received with a giggle.

“What a flirtation you have been having ! It has quite amused me.”

“Has it ? I am very happy to have amused you.”

“I don’t think I ever saw Hannah Brown flirt before.”

“Probably not. Are you sure she has been flirting now ?”

Miss Westcote was not very bright. She fancied Mr. Edgar Smith was gratifying her

by a little detraction of Hannah Brown.

"I thought so; but I am sure I don't know why, people don't generally admire her."

"Don't they? If you don't know why, it is not to be wondered at that I don't know why either. Do you think her pretty?"

"I! Oh no; nobody does, that I know of."

"I will tell you of one person, then, who does."

"Oh, pray do. Who?"

"I do."

Miss Westcote had recourse to the giggle with which she was wont to fill up any hiatus in conversation. Talking was not her forte. She looked Mr. Edgar Smith full in the face, with a sort of feeling that he might be joking. But, perhaps because

she was no physiognomist, she could read nothing there to enable her to decide the point. She thought he looked amused ; but that it was at Hannah Brown, she did not feel so certain perhaps as she could have wished. Edgar Smith remained beside her till the supper-trays made their appearance, but her flirtation with him was not altogether so satisfactory and comfortable as she had expected. Miss Westcote was not much of a philosopher, or she might have consoled herself with the reflection—like most true things trite, and like most trite things, invested on occasions with all the force of originality—that mortal affairs seldom do turn out as they are expected. Nor, 'had Miss Westcote been capable of making a general reflection, would it have been trite to her. Nothing is trite to stupidity ; and when, by the irresistible power

of circumstance, an idea is forced upon the stupid, it is attended with all the surprise of novelty. You see, my clever reader, all the advantages are not on your side, so much for the law of compensation.

But perhaps on the present occasion, Miss Westcote's feelings were too much excited to permit of her making general reflections.

When she returned home, and her mother, who had absented herself from the party on account of a headache, asked her what kind of evening she had had, she answered,

"Oh, so hot and tiresome! I was so sorry I had put on my new dress."

"Were the Smiths there?"

"Yes. Edgar Smith is the most conceited creature. Such ridiculous airs he gives himself!"

“Airs! Young men who have been brought up abroad often do. But I should hardly have thought he would have given himself airs to you. These Smiths are so full of pretence—as if I did not remember what a different position they were in when I was a girl. I must say the Browns are very different, though they have a much better right. Hannah is always so unassuming and quiet.”

“I am not so sure of that, mamma. She is a sly thing, and such a dowdy as she looked to-night, with her arm in a sling. Only fancy, Edgar Smith says she is pretty,” and a slight bitter giggle betrayed to Mrs. Westcote, who, though not absolutely a genius, was yet a cleverer woman than her daughter, what had been the jarring element in the party.

“Nonsense, my dear! He could not

really think so. Nobody does. I have no doubt he said it to tease you; but you must not let him see that it does."

"Oh, it does not tease me at all, I assure you."

"My darling! Do you think Edgar Smith has no eyes?"

Mary Westcote at last condescended to smile, and a glance in the mirror, at her own great blue orbs, inclined her to take her mother's view of the question. But she had still sufficient misgiving to invest the affair with the interest of uncertainty.

But I have been anticipating the natural course of the events of the evening. Mr. Smith, senior, appeared about the same time as the trays, and, after everybody had partaken liberally of chicken and tongue, rich creams and jellies, heavy

cakes and strong negus, the party broke up.

Miss Brown's servant had come for her and Miss Wellby, who lived near the Browns; but Mr. Edgar Smith could not hear of the two ladies walking such a distance—Miss Westcote lived near Miss Richards—without being protected by one of the stronger sex. It was in vain that Miss Wellby represented that Mr. Greenfield's way lay along with theirs, and that it would be a great distance for him to walk back alone to Tudor Lodge.

Mr. Edgar Smith "liked a solitary walk on a summer night. I am romantic, Miss Wellby," he said, a slight smile playing round the corners of his mouth. Miss Wellby laughed scornfully.

"Romantic! Take my word for it,

Mr. Edgar, common sense is better than romance."

"I am not so sure of that, Miss Wellby. Perhaps it may be better in the abstract, but it is not better to me. It may be my taste to prefer living on gooseberry-fool to roast-beef."

"The more fool you, then," said Clara.

Edgar laughed. He was very good-natured, and so Miss Clara thought. She was pleased, moreover, with her own wit, or what she considered wit. She had not liked Edgar Smith walking home with them, having quite sense enough to set down this piece of gallantry to Hannah's account. As long as she could remember Goslingford, and that was all her life, there had been rivalry, to call it by the mildest name, between the Smiths and the Browns. Now, Clara was of opinion

that the thing which had been was the thing which *should* be, and that a Mr. Smith should admire a Miss Brown appeared to her unnatural and portentous, and she had felt quite fidgety at having been forced into a semblance of countenancing anything so anomalous. But she would speak to Hannah to-morrow.

It was a fine moonlight night, the sky without a cloud, and the midsummer twilight in the north-west seemed to struggle for ascendancy with the beams of the moon, which rose, round as a wheel, and looked over the chimney tops and the ancient gables into the cruciform streets of Goslingford. Hannah was a little too much excited to admire as much as usual the broad shadows and the white lights, and the quaint dark outlines of peak and chimney beneath the silver blue sky; or to note,

with her artist's eye, the solitary light from some cottage window, or the picturesque interior of some little huckster's shop. Hannah was walking as quietly as she usually did on a fine moonlight or starlight night, but she did not much observe outward things. She was feeling, rather than thinking, though she scarcely knew what her feelings were. The predominant one, perhaps, was, that she was actually leaning on the arm of Edgar Smith, the hereditary foe of her father's house. Certain recollections of Romeo and Juliet, Lucy Ashton and the Master of Ravenswood, &c., floated before her agitated brain; for, though but a modern attorney's daughter, she actually recognised in the history of these romantic heroines something that seemed akin to her own humble, destiny. But, then, quiet Hannah Brown,

in the recesses of her own heart, was a very romantic girl.

They had walked about half-way to the Old Red House, when Mr. Edgar Smith, who had hitherto been chatting with Miss Wellby, suddenly addressed Hannah—

“Of course, Miss Brown, you are familiar with Shakspeare?”

“Shakspeare!” cried Miss Clara, whose associations with Shakspeare were limited to a vivid recollection of the outside of eight middle-aged volumes, handsomely bound in calf, and occupying an honourable, dusty place in her late father’s library. Shakspeare, to Miss Clara, was a book that her father and other clever and literary men read, and authors quoted. At her father’s sale she had purchased in the well-known eight volumes, as she felt that it was respectable

to have them on her own bookshelf at the top of the chiffoniere in her drawing-room; but she would about as soon have thought of Hannah Brown reading the Koran. "You forget, Mr. Edgar, that Hannah has not been at a college, and learnt all the sciences, like the Miss Smiths."

Now, Edgar did not quite see what connection there was between Shakspeare and the scientific education of his sisters, so he could only laugh, while poor Hannah remained very uncomfortable and nervous on account of Clara's, as it seemed to her, scarcely polite speech.

They had now come in sight of the church, and Edgar admired the elegance of the slender spire, as it rose up so clear and tapering under the moonlight sky, and the dark shadow beneath the old Norman

arch in the porch, and the fine old trees, so shady and so solemn. And then Hannah began to speak, and to join warmly in the admiration; for that ancient church, and those venerable trees, had early impressed the girl's imagination, and she tasted with joy this first draught of sympathy in feelings as old as her memory. Clara, too, admired the church, but it was because it was the church; and, in the presence of a dissenter, more especially, she felt a sort of personal triumph in the acknowledged superiority of its architecture and antiquity.

The triumph was, perhaps, a little spoiled by the fact that Edgar did not seem altogether to regard it as a triumph, but as a matter of fact universally acknowledged.

"I often," said Hannah, at last joining

in the conversation, "wonder what kind of people they were who built such places. What great thoughts!—what sublime perseverance they must have had! I often wish I could realise the spirit of the men whose imagination bodied forth such grand monuments of their genius."

"It was the monkish spirit, my dear," said Clara, who, like most people, when she said she liked old ways and old thoughts, meant only the ways and the thoughts of her own youth, and who viewed the people of remote times, as of remote countries, with a species of contempt. "If you want to know about it, I have a very nice abridged History of England; but, though they did build fine churches, they were such fools then, they are not worth reading about."

"But if they had all been fools, Aunt

Clara, how could they have built the churches?"

"They framed Magna Charta, too," said Edgar.

"Well, well, they were thought fools in my day, and it was not the fashion then for young people to be wiser than their parents. Somebody, I have no doubt, will tell us some day that Bloody Mary was a humane queen, and old King Harry a just ruler and a moral man, though he was fond of cutting off the heads of his wives."

Miss Clara little thought when she made this speech that it would prove prophetic. But she triumphed in silencing her companions, who probably thought it was as well not to employ arguments where arguments were of no use. What is the use of overthrowing an enemy who

is never conscious of defeat? When you imagined you had beaten Miss Clara to the dust with a sledge-hammer on one side, there she was on the other, aiming her arrows at you as lively as ever, and with all the pride of victory.

According to her intention, she called on Hannah Brown the next morning.

"Hannah," she said, "I do not approve of this foolish flirtation with Edgar Smith. It can come to no good. And if it were to go further——"

If it were to go further! Hannah's heart beat at the ideas this "going further" vaguely raised in her mind, and then it suddenly sank. Nothing pleasant was right for her. It was the old story again.

"You must put a stop to it at once."

“Oh, Aunt Clara! How can I?—he has been so kind to me.”

And she coloured painfully, while her lip trembled, and a tear rose to her eye.

Miss Wellby had a kind heart. She felt herself slightly choking for a second, but it was not her wont to exhibit such emotions.

“My dear, I do not blame you, but I am very angry with Edgar Smith, and if it were not for your dignity I would speak to him. Men have not much consideration for us, Hannah, and they can wring our hearts for a few hours’ amusement—even men who are not thought bad men. You have no mother, my poor girl, and neither your father nor Mr. Smith would approve of this. It is all very well that good-natured simpleton,

Harriet, talking about Christian forgiveness, but it is contrary to common sense. Oh, Hannah, why do you cry?"

"I am sure I don't know."

"But I know, Hannah, if this is not put a stop to, it will break your heart. You have not the spirit of some other people. And it went hard enough with them, too. But that is an old story, gone and done long ago."

"But what am I to do, Aunt Clara?"

"Don't encourage him."

"I will not; but I cannot be uncivil to him. No one else has ever been so kind to me."

"Some kindness is no kindness, Hannah. And now remember; you are warned!"

And Miss Clara took leave—kissing her young friend with more than usual

tenderness. She felt she must not stay, lest she should show more sympathy than she wished.

Poor Hannah felt miserably depressed; but first hopes are not, after all, so easily crushed. Hannah began to think of what Miss Richards was reported to have said about Christian forgiveness. Were forgiveness and good sense so incompatible? And if forgiveness did not mean reconciliation and mutual oblivion of offence, what did it mean?

Hannah was not naturally a very bold thinker, but she did begin to suspect that common sense was either a misnomer or a different thing from good sense.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION AT GOSLING-
FORD ABOUT SUNDRY SOCIAL MATTERS.

ADVICE, more especially unasked advice, is proverbially of little use. There is therefore nothing new in Miss Clara's counsel falling fruitless to the ground. Or, if it had any effect, it was merely to give Hannah occasionally, when it came across her, an uneasy, uncomfortable sensation. But, on the whole, life had never been so

pleasant to Hannah Brown as it was at present. The first time she had met Edgar Smith after her conversation with Miss Wellby (the interview was in the street), she had endeavoured to pass him, but Edgar was not to be so served. He stopped to inquire for her arm, and to shake hands, and then he discovered he was going the same way, and walked with her as far as the draper's shop at which she was going to make some purchases. The Goslingford public, having discovered that Hannah Brown had met the Smiths, at Miss Richards' tea-party, without any terrific social explosion, or even without that heavy gloom which usually results from inharmonious elements in a party, immediately began to follow the example set by good Miss Harriet, and to invite Hannah Brown to meet the Smiths. It

saved the Goslingford party-givers the uncomfortable alternative of either leaving Hannah to mope alone in the dismal solitude of the Old Red House, or of giving another set of little, inferior parties, especially for her benefit. Old Brown had for many years—ever since Mrs. Brown's death—given up promiscuous party-giving and party-going. About once a-year he entertained his own old friends, and year by year these were diminishing in number. Often Miss Wellby dropped in to tea; and occasionally she and the Greenfield family were more formally invited to the same old-fashioned meal; but with these exceptions, the Browns did not see any society. The Smiths, on the contrary, were the greatest party-givers in the place. Many people—nay, most people—said it was very foolish and unnecessary in them to give so many parties, and

such expensive parties, and to introduce so many fashions unheard-of in Goslingford; still nobody liked to be left out at these parties, and, in consequence, at the best Goslingford reunions it was felt that, whoever was omitted, the Smiths must be asked.

Hannah Brown could not be quite ignored. Goslingford gentility had an hereditary respect for the Browns. They were the oldest and most respected family in the place—identified as it were with the respectability of the Borough itself. So respectable they were, that the mere fact of visiting them was in itself respectable. Then people were sorry for “poor Hannah,” “she was so inoffensive, and led such a dull life,” though many doubted if she found it dull. Then she would be rich some day, and it was not an uncommon

opinion in Goslingford, though Miss Wellby and Mr. Greenfield dissented from it, that Hannah Brown would be the Harriet Richards of the next Goslingford generation. *

This notion had, however, somewhat begun to decline since the advent of Edgar Smith, and since Hannah Brown was more seen at the gayer Goslingford parties.

Monkeys are not more imitative than men, and we imitate not only fashions of dress and manner, but fashions of thought and opinion. How many of us, I wonder, have an original opinion even about the colour of a ribbon? Some have certainly, but a small minority. On the other hand, let anyone of us only have sufficient self-confidence, or effrontery, to maintain boldly, and without the weakness of the

smallest hesitation, any opinion on any subject, and it will soon be echoed all round with equal confidence.

And so, as Edgar Smith had discovered that Hannah Brown was pretty, other people now found out that there was something "very interesting" in her appearance, she "was much improved," and "really did look pretty." And, when this was once acknowledged, the Goslingford beaux would not let Edgar Smith have her all to himself. They stood behind her chair, and fetched her fan, and talked mainly to her, and she was, in one sense, much gratified, even sometimes when she was ready to yawn in their faces with very weariness, from the dismal dearth of sense or wit in the conversation, which she felt a compliment.

Poor, simple Hannah Brown! I fear

you despise her, and think she had no greatness of soul. It was so pleasant to her to think, after all, she could be attractive like other people. Should you like to feel yourself despised and neglected, dear reader? No, of course you would not—by people of judgment; but you would not mind what such people as the Goslingford people thought. But then Hannah Brown knew no other people. Goslingford was her world, and not so much unlike the great world, perhaps, as one might at first imagine.

And now, I fancy I see the utter contempt with which you of the enlarged mind, who have spent seasons in London, and seasons in Paris; to whom the *mer de glace* is as familiar as the German or Atlantic Oceans, and who have even “wintered at Rome,” view the

smallness and the narrowness of Goslingford life. Yet the Goslingford world was just as important to the Goslingford people, as your great world is to you. And why not? What do the inhabitants of Neptune, for instance, if proportioned mentally to the size of their planet, and if the old-fashioned notion be correct, that there are "more worlds than one," think of us? Something similar, probably, to what you think of the Goslingford people.

In old-fashioned houses one sometimes sees, at the end of a room, a little convex mirror—there are many such in Goslingford—which affords, in diminished perspective, a view of the apartment and its inmates. I have often watched with amusement, the little gestures, the seemingly mimic graces of these Lilliputian

men and women, and, in doing so, have been invaded by a sense of the ludicrous. And yet these tiny figures were our very selves. It was only their proportions that gave them a tinge of absurdity. Now, the doings of dukes, and countesses, and statesmen, and authors on the theatre of the great world, are, after all, animated by the same motives, and stimulated by the same ambition, as those of the Goslingford people on their little country-town theatre. The difference is in the size of the stage, not in the passions of its actors.

But this is very stale, you will say. Dean Swift showed us, long ago, in *Gulliver*, how small, and contemptible, and degraded we all are. He did. But I want to show you, amid all its smallnesses, how the universal human heart, even reflected in the convex lens of a

country town, has its noble as well as its trivial side.

“No man is a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*,” says the adage. I think it is Carlyle who remarks, that if this be true it is the valet’s fault. Now, all life is noble to those who are noble enough to look through the trivialities which overlie the outside. Perhaps the feeling of the nobleman, who, for the first time, appears at the drawing-room in blue ribbon and star, may even be akin to that of Miss Westcote, when she astonishes a Goslingford party with a new specimen of Buttonborough millinery; or, when Mrs. Smith makes a new domestic financial arrangement, which adds to the family comfort, while it saves the family purse, has she not a feeling, in its small and humble way, akin to that

of Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Disraeli when they achieve, or think they have achieved, a like feat in the production of the new budget?

But to return to Hannah Brown. She had, as far as was possible with one so shy, become the fashion at Goslingford; though it is probable, had Edgar Smith not had an opinion of his own, she might have been one of those flowers born to blush unseen, merely because the world does not see with its own eyes. And is this an uncommon thing in the great world? How many faces have we thought beautiful because some leader of fashion said they were beautiful! How many books have we cried up as clever, merely because some authority made it the fashion to think so!

Dancing was not a very favourite

amusement at Goslingford. Still dancing-parties did occasionally take place, and were looked upon as great events by Young Goslingford. They were talked about for a week before and a week after their occurrence. Miss Harriet Richards, of course, thought dancing a sin; and equally, of course, Miss Clara Wellby took a directly contrary view.

“I have no patience, Harriet, with people dancing till they are too old and too wrinkled to find partners, and then turning round on the young and the blooming, and saying, ‘You shall not dance—it is a sin!’ any more than I should have any patience with a man who was ordered by his physician to abstain from wine, and then went about preaching tee-totalism as essential to salvation. Very like the old fable of the

dog and the manger, which I sometimes think must have been made prophetically for the present generation. I remember when the Smiths thought it a sin to dance, but now that they have stylish grown-up daughters, they seem to have changed their minds."

Poor Harriet returned no answer. This especial backsliding of the Smiths was a sore subject with her. If they had been any persons but themselves, she would have had, and would have declared, very decided opinions on the point. But the Smiths! And she thought and said it was some great and temporary delusion under which such pious people would not be permitted long to remain.

Some people, no doubt, will say that Miss Harriet was not very consistent; but who among us is?—and what a world

this would be—how hard, how uncharitable, how unloving, if everybody's conduct was in logical sequence with everybody's opinion. Then let us be thankful there is so little consistency.

As it was a moot point in Goslingford, Hannah Brown had taken it into consideration whether or not it was right to dance. Now Hannah had rather an uncommon way of deciding such points—differing, for instance, from that of the Miss Smiths. When she was very fond of anything she was not at all ingenious in discovering reasons in its favour, but generally suspected its harmlessness, so singularly was it a fixed idea in her mind that self-denial rather than self-indulgence was the root of all virtue. Now, Hannah had hitherto rather disliked dancing. When she had danced it was

rather to oblige society than to please herself, so that the temptations of dancing being unfelt by her, her conscience had pronounced it harmless; but she would not join Aunt Clara in condemning as conceited and self-righteous those who thought otherwise. If she and Miss Wellby ever quarrelled, it was about Lucy Greenfield, the Rector's third daughter, who, young, admired, and beautiful, had declared for the other side of the question.

This, Miss Wellby was of opinion, arose from conceit and spiritual pride; but Hannah, with her wider sympathies, could feel for the poor girl who had not only renounced triumphs which her own heart whispered must be gratifying to woman's vanity, but bore bravely, though, perchance, with keenest suffering, all the

misconstruction and the hard judgment to which the insulted self-complacency of others subjected her.

"Don't talk to me, Hannah. Is she not saying to all the other girls in Goslingford, 'Stand by, I am holier than thou?'"

"I cannot see that, Aunt Clara. Dancing, without being a sin to other people, might be a sin to her, if it made her vain or jealous, or took her mind away from her duties."

"Then if it did so, she should have been ashamed of having such a mind, and have humbled herself instead of setting herself up. She ought not to have allowed herself to feel such things."

"Perhaps the very reason she has given up dancing is because she will not allow herself."

"Don't talk nonsense to me, Hannah. We shall hear of you doing the same some day."

"There is not much fear of my being tempted in the same way," said poor Hannah, with a half-regretful sigh.

But the time was nearer, perhaps, than Hannah expected. She had plenty of partners now, but, somehow or other, it did not elate or interest her much. She had a deeper interest now in a party than the mere hope of receiving her share of attention (more than her share the humble Hannah had never aimed at), and the almost certainty that this hope would be gratified, lent to her mind a pleasurable, though not violent, excitement, which left little room for other emotions.

There was to be a grand party at Mr.

Splint's. Mr. Splint was the principal surgeon in Goslingford. He had risen from small beginnings, but he was really a clever man and a conscientious man, and had prospered accordingly. He had married early in life, and had a goodly array of sons and daughters of all sizes, from two feet in height to six. The party was given in honour of the majority of his eldest son—a tall, red-whiskered youth, who was intended to follow the profession of his father.

Mr. Splint lived at the end of one of the cross streets of Goslingford, in a large house with green railings in front, and a great many staring windows, looking on the street. This house had once had three pointed gables, but had been new-fronted in the time of Mr. Splint's predecessor—a change which had been thought a great

improvement. Behind the house there was a very large garden and orchard, which, on this festive occasion, was to be decorated with arches, flowers, &c. But Mr. Splint did not, like the Smiths, imitate the manners and hours of the great world. Like most of the Goslingford people, he thought four the proper hour for a dinner party, and seven for an evening party; and a chorus of praise arose from all quarters on account of his good sense. It must have been from a singular opacity of intellectual vision in Hannah Brown that she could not perceive the superiority of sense connected with an entertainment which began at four in the afternoon and lasted all round the clock. It struck her that it would have been pleasanter divided into three. She was not, however, asked to the four o'clock

dinner, but to the seven o'clock ball. There were to be only gentlemen at the dinner, which Edgar Smith had previously told Hannah Brown he considered a remnant of barbarism, and a practice which, when he had a house of his own, he would set his face against.

"That is," he continued, looking away from her, and with less self-possession than she had ever seen in him before, "that is, if my wife (if I am so happy as ever to possess a wife) should be of my opinion." Then, suddenly raising his eyes, and looking Hannah full in the face, but with a raised colour, he asked, "What would you do, Miss Brown?"

But Hannah's heart had almost performed the feat to which, under certain circumstances, these fleshly force-pumps are said to be prone, of jumping into her

mouth, and agitation would not permit her to reply, more especially as they were in the street. They had met at a call on Miss Richards, and Edgar's way had lain in the same direction as Hannah's. Ere either of them could speak again, they were joined by Miss Wellby, who had crossed the street on purpose, a little to the discomfiture of Hannah, and not a little to the chagrin of Edgar.

"I am just going home, Hannah, so we will walk together. I met your mother looking for you in North Street, Mr. Edgar, so we will not detain you. Good morning."

"Good morning, Miss Wellby," he answered, almost fiercely, and then turning to Hannah, he continued, with a slight glance of defiance at her self-elected com-

panion, "I shall wish the hours away to-morrow between the dinner and the ball."

"Hannah! Hannah!" said Aunt Clara, as soon as he was gone, "what does this mean?"

"I don't know," said Hannah, meekly, but she was not sad.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. SPLINT'S BALL.

EDGAR SMITH was by no means, in a general way, indifferent to the attractions of turtle soup, venison, champagne, and port of the twenty vintage, and the other good cheer which the old-fashioned English hospitality of Goslingford piqued itself on setting before its guests on grand occasions. But in spite of these gastro-nomic alleviations of their tedium, the

three hours passed at table, on Mr. Frederick Splint's birthday, did seem to him more intolerably long than any three hours in his life had ever seemed before. He was, moreover, almost perfectly silent—quite a phenomenon in Edgar Smith.

Hannah Brown, in the meantime, was dressing for the ball. Aunt Clara arrived to superintend the completion of her toilet, and to act as her *chaperone*, for in spite of her annoyance of the previous day, and her dread of what the evening might bring forth, a ball toilet, and Hannah Brown's ball toilet, was a subject of too engrossing interest not for the moment to supersede all other considerations. Miss Clara pronounced her young friend's dress to be "very nice." In her heart she thought her looking something very much beyond very nice, but it was contrary to

Miss Wellby's principles to make anybody conceited.

And as Hannah stood in front of the old mirror on the end wall of her bedroom, contemplating her figure by the red light of a September sunset, she did not herself feel discouraged. In truth, the Goslingford people were not mistaken when they said Hannah Brown was improved. She wore a very pretty and becoming dress certainly ; but it was not, as Miss Clara supposed, to it that the improved looks were due ; for though the snowy folds of her drapery showed to advantage her slender figure, though her coronet of oak leaves and acorns was elegant as well as Druidical, though the diamond brooch which had been her mother's glittered bright on her modest bosom, the difference was owing rather to the fuller life which

had sent the blood to her cheek in a warmer glow, and given to her eye the excitement of hope. Even her long brown ringlets seemed to share in the improvement, and to have this evening a softer and more graceful fall. Poor Hannah Brown! This night was the culminating point of her youth—perhaps the only night of her life in which she felt really young.

Hannah was looking quite as well, only with a little higher colour and rather brighter eyes, when she and Miss Wellby were ushered into Mrs. Splint's drawing-room. Mrs. Splint's drawing-room was a large, long room, with a large window at one end—now open, and with two or three steps down into the garden. Not many of the evening guests had arrived. Miss Westcote was there, however, in a re-

splendent Buttonborough dress—all pink and gold, and flowers, and slightly suggestive of a performance on the tight rope. The gentlemen had not come in from the dining-room, and Hannah felt a momentary sensation of disappointment. But as she finished shaking hands with Mrs. Splint, and the three grown-up Miss Splints, she heard her name pronounced behind her by a voice which brought an additional rush of blood to her cheeks, and made her foolish heart beat with nervous agitation, for there are certain kinds of pleasure which feel not very different from pain.

“I hope you are not engaged for the first quadrille, Miss Brown?” said Edgar boldly, before everybody, and with a certain air of devotion, as if he did not care whether people remarked upon it or not. Hannah answered in a very low tone, and very

shyly, that she was not engaged, on which Edgar placed himself by her side, evidently with the intention of waiting till the dancing should commence. This was not for some time; but, in the meantime, little passed between them. There was a slight mutual awkwardness, which lasted even through the quadrille. When that dance was finished, they stood together at the window—Edgar seeming resolved not to leave his partner; yet the awkwardness, if possible, increased. A waltz was now played, and a few couples were soon on the floor.

Waltzing was not a favourite dance in Goslingford, and at the time I write of, had not been long introduced. Miss Wellby was more lively in her condemnation of it even than Miss Richards, and she now sat down at the far end of the room in

virtuous indignation. This was an unfortunate evening for poor Miss Clara. Edgar Smith's conduct had chafed her not a little, and now this waltzing quite upset her already irritated spirits.

"The young people of the present day," she said, "have no sense of propriety, and their wilfulness is beyond endurance. What *is* the world coming to?"

Example is catching, and even though it was in prudish English Goslingford, there were now many pairs whirling round in the dizzy foreign maze.

"Will you join in the waltz, Miss Brown?" said Edgar Smith.

"Thank you, I—I don't waltz."

Edgar's blue eye positively sparkled. "I am glad you don't," he said, "for I would rather be denied the pleasure of waltzing with you than see any one else

do so. The people here say I have foreign ways, but you see, I am old-fashioned and English enough in some of my feelings. Will you take a turn in the garden, while these people are dancing? I see two or three persons there already."

Hannah's silence passed for assent, and he led her down the steps into the garden.

It was by no means a very tasteful garden; still, smooth shaven turf and bright flowers, however arranged, must always possess some beauty. The evening too was very fine—bright and clear as fine evenings generally are in early September—and the golden radiance of the autumn twilight had begun to give place to the colder light of stars, while the crescent moon grew every moment brighter as it sank in the darkening sky, over the fading meadows. The air was soft and tepid, but it seemed fresh and

cool after the steaming ball-room; and the magnolia over the drawing-room windows filled it with fragrance.

Hannah Brown leant on the arm of Edgar Smith. He could feel that her fingers trembled a little, but that might have been from the heat and the dancing. His own heart, however, thumped so loudly that he fancied she must hear it.

“You have read ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ Miss Brown, have you not? though you have never had the advantage of being at a ladies’ college?” Ye—yes,” said Hannah, and he felt sure now her hands did tremble.

“And what do you think of the Montagues and Capulets?”

“Think of them!—How?”

“Don’t you think they were fools? They hated each other till they had lost all that was worth living for, and then,

when it was too late, they were reconciled. So most people do. It is the way of the world." Edgar paused, but Hannah made no response. He then continued,—“I think quarrels between families, of all kinds, peculiarly foolish and wicked. There is more excuse for personal quarrels. I always hated them, Miss Brown, and always made up my mind that I would have nothing to do with them. How easy is it to misconstrue a man's every act, if one wishes to do so!”

“Very easy,” said Hannah, who thought Edgar Smith the noblest-minded of men.

“You agree with me, then,” he said, and he looked eagerly down on her face, which she hastily turned towards the ground.

“Yes,” she said “I do,” but her tongue

felt so tied and heavy, it could hardly utter the three short words.

“But I would not act like Romeo, that is, if I were in Romeo’s place. I would have gone boldly to old Capulet, like an honourable man; and it is my belief, from what followed, that, if Romeo had done so, he might have married Juliet in the face of day, instead of in the sneaking way he did. I do not approve of any one of the lot. Tell me what you think. I would give worlds to know.”

“I—I,” but Hannah’s lips closed; her bodily powers seemed under some strange mesmeric, benumbing influence; and yet she knew—by clairvoyance probably—as her eyes were still on the ground, that his were riveted on her.

“Hannah! if you will give me leave, I will go to your father to-morrow and tell

him how I love you. May I—Hannah?”

She said neither yes nor no; but he knew what she meant, and taking her hand, which yet rested on his arm, he led her round the garden, and talked the nonsense which is sweeter far than wisdom, let moralists and philosophers say what they please. And when at last Hannah, who now knew from experience—

“How silver sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night,”

awoke to a sense that something was due to society and the Splints, and urged a return to the dancing room, people said he made himself quite ridiculous. Hannah, herself, hardly liked it. And yet she was happy—wildly happy.

Till the end of her life, that night at the Splints seemed as it did even now, while yet real and present a bewildering,

intoxicating vision. The ground she trod did not seem like the solid earth ; the light, and the music, and the moving figures, appeared all phantom-like ; and the voice of her lover, and the eager cares with which he encircled her, more unreal, though more sweet, than anything besides.

Poor Clara Wellby sat in dismay. She was cross and perturbed, and when Edgar handed Hannah to her carriage, shawling and cloaking her with the deepest interest, and beseeching her not to catch cold, she fumed and chafed and almost scolded.

“Hannah,” she said, as they drove off, “I have seldom spent such a night of vexation and annoyance. You know I warned you at the very beginning what this folly and nonsense would lead to.”

“Oh, Aunt Clara !” said Hannah, be-

seechingly, and laying her head on her old friend's shoulder, "do let me be happy for this one night."

Clara said no more; but as she stroked the long tresses which hung over her own bosom, Hannah fancied she heard her murmur, "Poor child!"

CHAPTER X.

A CRISIS.

HANNAH slept but little the night after Mrs. Splint's ball. Her head was in a whirl, her heart beat, and her excitement was almost feverish. About an hour before getting-up time, she fell into a disturbed, dreamy slumber, from which she was awakened by the housemaid, with the warm water. Poor Hannah! She looked very pale and haggard this morning. A sort of re-action had come from the ex-

citement of the previous evening, and the anxieties of the coming day appeared almost too great to be borne.

Mr. Brown always came home to dinner punctually at three o'clock, and this was the hour chosen for Edgar's important interview with him.

It yet wanted five minutes to three o'clock. Hannah was in the drawing-room, and her father standing on the terrace walk in front of the windows, when Edgar's knock at the door almost took away her breath. The window was open, so she heard her father's slight, gruff exclamation of surprise, and beheld his somewhat chagrined countenance as the servant announced to him that Mr. Edgar Smith was in the book-room, and wished to see him. And now, how can I give you an idea of poor Hannah's state of mind?

How long that agony of suspense lasted, she could not herself have told. At first, she tried to take her needlework; but she laid it down again immediately, and began to walk up and down the old drawing-room. How loud and how slow the time-piece on the high, carved wooden chimney-piece ticked! It seemed to echo the throbs of poor Hannah's heart. Then she stood still for a minute, and looked out on the garden. The lengthening shadow of the spire already began to project tapering into the middle, and beyond and around the September sunshine looked so bright and calm, that her agitated spirits seemed to sicken at the contrast.

For many a long day the sight of that scene of silence and sunshine pierced Hannah's heart like a poisoned arrow. She

turned from, it and mechanically took up the books and ornaments on the table. Then she opened the door, as if from the farther corner of the house, where her father and lover were closeted, she could hear some sign of her fate. How interminable seemed the time! And yet it was only a few minutes.

At last, the bell of the book-room (Mr. Brown would not allow it to be dignified with the title of library,) rang sharply. Hannah felt as if she must faint. It seemed to her that the maid was never going to answer it. She threw herself upon the sofa. She heard footsteps approaching the drawing-room.

"If you please, Miss," said the maid, "Master wishes to see you in the book-room immediately."

The crisis of her fate had indeed come. Her legs seemed almost to refuse to bear

her along the passage, and when she came to the door she gasped for breath.

Mr. Brown and Edgar Smith were both standing. Edgar at the window, apparently looking out on the church-yard ; Mr. Brown at a writing-table in the middle of the room.

Hannah dared not look at her father's face ; but she instinctively felt it was a bad omen that her lover did not advance to meet her, or even turn to her on her entrance. He made, however, an involuntary twitching movement as he heard the door open and close. Hannah took hold of the back of a chair. The moment was sickening.

“Hannah !” said her father, and one could perceive that it was only with an effort he spoke firmly, “this young gentleman, this Mr. Edgar Smith, tells

me that it is with your consent that he comes here to ask mine to his marrying you. Is this true?"

Hannah could just find words to answer—"Yes, father." She trembled excessively; but she was beginning to get less nervous, though more alarmed.

"Hannah," he said, and there was grief and severity in his tone; "had I not heard this from your own lips, I could not have believed it. Are you aware that this gentleman is one of a family who would do anything—anything not in the world's opinion dishonest—to better themselves, that they even avow such principles? Have you forgotten, poor simple girl, that you are the only heir of my fortune, and has it never struck you that to a Smith

that may have been one of your chief attractions? ”

Here Edgar turned fiercely round, and confronted Mr. Brown with angry eyes. Edgar, though he was not quite blind to family faults, like all the Smiths, had strong family affections. But if he intended to speak, Hannah prevented him.

“Father,” she said, firmly, “you are mistaken. He would have loved me all the same, if I had not had sixpence. I know he would.”

“Thank you, Hannah—thank you for ever,” said the lover, earnestly.

“You have great confidence in your own charms, it appears,” said Mr. Brown.

“No, father; but I have great confidence in Mr. Smith’s sincerity.”

“God bless you, Hannah!” said the

young man, "now no accusation can wound me."

"Fine words, and the folly of a lovesick girl," said Mr. Brown, "will not alter facts, will not excuse you, Mr. Smith, for clandestinely stealing my daughter's heart, when you must have known such an alliance would be distasteful to me."

"Sir, I have not clandestinely stolen your daughter's heart. I have sought her in the face of the world, and the moment I have known my affection was returned, I have sought your countenance. I knew there were grudges between the families, but I hoped this union might have been the means of terminating feelings which are neither right nor wise."

"Perhaps, young man, your elders

may be as good judges of that as you. And now, Hannah, that you know my opinion, and I think you ought to have known it from the beginning, will you inform me what you intend to do?"

Hannah looked up in amazement, and faltered out something about her father's consent. Old William Brown became very pale, set his lips firmly, and answered—

"That I should willingly consent that you make yourself miserable for life, is impossible. Hannah, you have but one alternative. You are my only child—the only thing left to me on earth to comfort my old age. Marry this man, and I will not curse you, I will not disinherit you; but if you do, you will break my heart, and bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

For a moment there was a pause.

If William Brown had been pale, his daughter became many degrees paler; but her trembling and her nervousness were over for the moment. She stood upright, and said in a firm though very low tone:

“Then, father, I will not marry him.”

But now Edgar started forward, his eyes sparkling, and his chest heaving:

“You will not marry me! I could not have believed this unless I had heard it from your own lips—I could not have believed that you—you would have been so heartless and cruel!”

Hannah burst into tears--this was more than she could bear.

“Oh, Edgar! I am not heartless. If you knew—Don’t reproach me, for I cannot bear it!”

“Nothing on earth would have induced

me to give you up ; but your woman's love is weak and shallow."

"I think, sir," said Mr. Brown, "this interview had better terminate. It must be highly painful to my daughter, and, as a gentleman, you must wish to spare her."

"God knows I would have given my life for her," said the young man, bitterly. "Farewell, Hannah—farewell, for ever—since so you wish it to be."

She made no answer in words, only her eyes, for one moment, sought his, with a mute, deprecating appeal. He took no notice of it then, but in after-days that look often haunted him painfully.

And so it was all over !

CHAPTER XI.

PUBLIC OPINION IN GOSLINGFORD IS DIVIDED.

AND now came the long days of trial for Hannah Brown. Hannah was resolved not to be ill. She rose the following morning at her usual time, and made her father's breakfast. Then she tried to employ herself. Reading was impossible. Housekeeping for an hour or two did better. Then she tried to work, but

the time had not yet come even for that. In that way she could not escape from her own thoughts.

She was thankful when, at last, Clara Wellby came—Clara, whose company she could often have dispensed with, though she was, at all times, grateful to her for her kindness. Clara saw it all at a glance, and her talkative sympathy, at this period, was not out of place. Hannah had not yet arrived at the time when sorrow seeks silence, and shrinks with dread from any infringement of it. Clara proposed that Hannah should go out with her, and make a few calls, and Hannah acceded. Anything to escape from her own recollections!

It was not long ere the Goslingford world became acquainted with the new phase of the ancient feud between the

Browns and the Smiths. And once more, as they had often been before, the rival merits and demerits of the two families became the engrossing topic of conversation, and parties ran high. Various reports were circulated with regard to the interview between Edgar Smith and Mr. Brown. Some said that Mr. Brown had turned the young man out of the house, while others averred that he had threatened Hannah with the same usage, if she ever spoke to her lover again. This, or something like it, was one version of the affair believed and circulated by the Smithian partisans. The Brownites maintained, on the contrary, that they did not believe that Mr. Brown ever thought of turning his daughter out of the house, or Edgar Smith either, and that if he did in the latter case, it only served him

right. Everybody knew that the Smiths were always looking after money, and would do anything to get it. Nobody but themselves, under the circumstances, would ever have thought of getting old Brown's money, but they stuck at nothing. Poor Hannah was a girl who had seen nothing of the world, and was not accustomed to much admiration, and it was no wonder, poor thing, she had been so easily taken in. Her father had done the really kind thing by her, and she would live to thank him.

On the other hand, the Smith party were quite as indignant at Hannah as at her father. Instead of being the quiet nobody of a girl everybody had supposed, she had turned out an arrant flirt, and, after giving poor Edgar Smith

every possible encouragement (had not everybody seen her outrageous flirting at Mrs. Splint's?), she had given him up in the coolest and most heartless manner. It was quite nonsense to say she could not help it. Mrs. Smith herself had said Hannah had behaved most heartlessly, and that she was thankful, for her part, that it was all quite over. And to this the Brownites were prone to answer that the grapes were sour.

What really did occur at the interview in Mr. Brown's book-room, nobody ever did know, except Miss Wellby. All that Miss Clara would say to the world was, that Hannah Brown had behaved most nobly, that there was not one in Goslingford good enough for her, and that she did not blame Mr.

Brown either. But Miss Richards, being a Smithite, did blame Mr. Brown. He had acted in a most unchristian manner. But "what could you expect from a man who thought week-day sermons out of place?" She would not, however, join in the censure on Hannah. She had "always liked the poor girl, though, perhaps, she had flirted a little lately." Miss Richards had, besides, very exalted notions of what was due to parental authority. So she comfortably laid all the blame on Mr. Brown, and, whenever his name was mentioned, sighed, and added—

"And a man of his age, too! Ah! it is very sad."

On which, Miss Wellby would fire up and answer—

"Sad! It is very sad, I think, that

Mr. Smith should be so fond of money at his age. And covetousness, you know, is idolatry, just all the same, Harriet, as if he told his beads to the Virgin."

"Ah! but his views—his views are so sound—his foundation so different from——"

"So much the worse for him, if he knows what is right, and does not do it. What is the use of a foundation if it has no superstructure?"

"Oh! Clara, surely you must know what I mean by——"

"Indeed, Harriet, I never know what you mean, except that everybody of your way of thinking is right, and everybody of any other way wrong, no matter what their actions." And Miss Clara laughed her triumphant laugh

over her prostrate friend and adversary.

But, as we all know,

“A man convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still.”

And so is a woman. Miss Richards was not to be induced to think like Miss Wellby. Nor was any Smithite persuaded to become a Brownite, nor any Brownite converted to Smithism, as far as I know. All the arguing and disputing, and gossiping and counter-gossiping, went for nothing, or, rather, tended only to confirm the separate parties more strongly in their own opinions. Mrs. Westcote, for instance, who, from the first, took strong Smith views, thought “that parents, when the choice of their children was respectable, had much to answer for in thwarting their affections,” while Miss

Westcote was lost in astonishment at the heartlessness of Hannah Brown. "*She* could not understand any woman acting so to the man she loved. If she loved anybody, she would never give him up—she would die for him—she would live on bread and water for his sake—she would gladly jump into the sea for him—she considered it a woman's privilege, as well as duty, to sacrifice everything for the man she loved." These sentiments were maintained everywhere vehemently by Miss Westcote, and a more or less garbled account of them reached the ears of Edgar Smith himself.

At the very next party at which he met her (Hannah Brown was not there, she was not asked to meet the Smiths now), he placed himself beside her, and

devoted himself to her. Miss Westcote began to feel that her hour of triumph was coming at last. She bridled and giggled, and the next day bought two new dresses and a new bonnet. Miss Westcote had great faith in the effect of silk and feathers on the male mind, or rather heart. She had not much idea of any other ornaments than the plaiting of hair and the wearing of gold and apparel.

It was now remarked by the Goslingford people that Edgar Smith was much seen with Miss Westcote, and appeared to be consoling himself for the loss of Hannah Brown. "Quite right," said the Smithites; "why should he wear the willow all his life for a cold-hearted jilt like Hannah Brown, who could go out and pay morning visits the very day her love-affair was broken

off?" And, "See," said the Brownites, "he never really cared for her. It was her money after all, and Mary Westcote is a fool not to see that he only takes her five thousand because he cannot get Hannah's fifteen."

Hannah Brown saw them herself one day, when she was sitting in Mrs. Splint's front parlour window, going down the street together, and the sight sent the blood all curdling back to her heart. She had been speaking to Mrs. Splint, when all of a sudden she stopped, stammered, and became very pale. Mrs. Splint was near the window, too, and saw who was passing. She was a kind-hearted and sensible woman, and divining the truth in a moment, brought her guest a glass of wine herself, and made her swallow it. Mrs. Splint, in a very quiet way, was a Brownite—in a

very quiet way, however, for Smiths and Browns were both patients of her husband's, and he never espoused any party cause. But Mrs. Splint knew that her eldest son, Fred, admired Mary Westcote, and at their party she had encouraged him not a little; and Mrs. Splint herself had looked favourably on the budding courtship. Now, she felt very angry with Edgar Smith for interfering with Fred's affections and prospects, and full of pity for poor Hannah Brown. In spite of her husband, she would never again sit silent when Hannah Brown was accused of heartlessness. Mrs. Splint "was sure *she* was not heartless. She had not flirted with anybody else since."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Westcote, with a sneer, "she has not had an opportunity." To which Mrs. Splint had replied:—

“Oh, anybody that wants to flirt, Mrs. Westcote, need be at no loss for an opportunity.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPRING WINDS.

HANNAH BROWN had kept her resolution. She had not given way, she had not fainted, she had not fallen ill, or taken to her bed, or shut herself up from the world; but it had been a hard struggle. Her father, whose powers of observation, as far at least as the character and feelings of his daughter Hannah were concerned, were not very keen, thought

she had not felt her disappointment much ; that it had been merely a passing girlish fancy ; that he had acted the part of a kind father, and that in her after-life she would be grateful to him. From the day of his interview with Edgar Smith he seemed, however, to have tacitly yielded her a new position. Old Brown—prejudiced, narrow-minded old country attorney as he was—had nothing mean or vulgar in his feelings. Because his daughter had fallen in love once without his knowledge, he did not, therefore, suspect her for evermore of being ready to form clandestine attachments. On the contrary, though he little appreciated the sacrifice she had actually made, he felt grateful to her for the surrender of her own wishes to his will, and never for one moment doubted her entire sin-

cerity. He respected his daughter more than he had ever done before, and he would have liked to testify to her the increased estimation in which he held her. Tenderness, it was not in the unemonstrative nature of William Brown to exhibit, neither could he take Hannah into his confidence or companionship. Girls, of course, could not understand business; and he could as little understand needlework and dress, which he imagined to be their chief sources of interest. But what he could do, he did. She was allowed to have entirely her own way in everything; if she was late, which rarely happened, or committed any other sin against her father's love of method or punctuality, she met with no reproaches or gloomy looks now. Then, he not only gave his consent as

in former days, but suggested visits to Buttonborough; and taking Miss Wellby into his confidence, Hannah would find, besides her always liberal allowance for clothes, presents of handsome new dresses and fashionable ornaments. Hannah was much touched by these acts of kindness, but they could not fill the void in her breast, or occupy the long hours of her weary days.

It would be impossible to describe the heart-sinking blank of the days and nights of the long winter which succeeded that sunny September, so pregnant with influence on the simple history of Hannah Brown—that September which gave a new edge and a more romantic interest to the ancient feud between the Browns and the Smiths. As the months passed, the heavy pressure of existence without

aim or hope began to tell on Hannah Brown. She became every day paler and more dejected, and she suffered much with headache. No wonder, when the struggle to keep up during the day was succeeded, as soon as she laid her head on her pillow at night, by bursts of tears and hours of wakeful misery.

It must not be supposed that Hannah had no religion. She did pray, poor girl! and with fervour, and she was comforted often by the hope of a world where there would be no cruel quarrels, no blank uselessness; but, in the meantime, life seemed so long, so tedious!

Hannah's imagination never pictured for herself an early death, but, rather, a long, loveless life. Poor Hannah! she was not an angelic paragon—only an erring, suffering, loving woman, with times of

darkness and moments of doubt; but through all, believing in the Love and Wisdom which had seen fit thus to try her.

Among other expedients she tried to attach herself to Miss Greenfield, as an assistant visitor of the poor. But she did not get on quite to that lady's satisfaction. She could not preach to, or exhort, or rebuke anybody. She could not speak to members of the opposite sex at all. She was only found good for reading the Bible to those who could not read themselves, and for administering physical relief—at least, so Miss Greenfield thought—and Hannah, in her humility, subscribed to the opinion; but long afterwards they both discovered that, though not from direct admonition, yet from some subtle personal influence, in

more hearts than one a little germ had been planted which, in the after time, grew into a goodly tree.

As the spring advanced, Hannah became worse and worse. She looked miserably weak and ill. Clara Wellby groaned and bemoaned, and fussed about her looks and her want of appetite, till Mr. Brown himself became alarmed. Mr. Brown was not easily alarmed, but if he once gave way to anxiety it was apt to become excessive. It was a long time ere he would admit that there was anything the matter with Hannah; but when at last the fact was forced upon his belief, his nervousness lest anything should befall this, his sole remaining child, knew no bounds. All at once Hannah assumed in his eyes an importance she had never possessed before, and he discovered, just

as he feared to lose her, that she was the light of his eyes and his sole hope on earth. And with anxiety for her health mingled another anxiety which he hardly acknowledged to himself, but which seemed occasionally to find some expression when he spoke to Clara Wellby.

“Girls are often delicate at Hannah’s age, are they not, Miss Wellby? She is just twenty-one now. Her mother was very delicate when she was twenty-three. Don’t you think it is the spring winds? She exposes herself too much to them. It must be the spring winds, it cannot be anything else?”

“I am sure I don’t know, Mr. Brown. Hannah used not to feel the spring winds. She is very reserved, and I sometimes think Hannah has feelings she never mentions.”

“Feelings?—what kind of feelings? She has very proper feelings. Hannah is a very good daughter—a very superior girl——”

“Very superior girl, Mr. Brown, but a very sensitive girl. She behaved very well in Sep——”

“Well!—she behaved nobly, and she must feel so herself, and she must see”—and as he spoke there was an accent of bitterness in the father’s voice—“she must see now that heartless scoundrel was as unworthy of her as I always knew him to be—running after that painted doll, who is no more fit to hold the candle to Hannah; all because of her paltry thousands. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, Miss Wellby, or a gentleman out of a Smith. Hannah must see this—she *must* see it,”

Mr. Brown repeated, with the eagerness of a man anxious to convince himself. "She must see, Clara, that there was nothing but kindness for her in my motives."

Mr. Brown had perhaps never in his life before, or, at least, never since the death of Mrs. Brown, been so communicative of his own feelings to any human being; but Clara Wellby had a way of gaining people's confidence. She was so frank and outspoken herself, so kind-hearted; and, above all, nobody was afraid of her, in spite of her sharp tongue.

"Very likely she sees it all, Mr. Brown. But suppose she does, I do not see that there is anything very cheering for her in the view. Perhaps a little change——"

“I do not see what good change could do her. Where could she possibly be so comfortable as at home? She must have everything she wants, and if she has not, let it be got for her.”

“But young people want—everybody, Mr. Brown, wants change sometimes.”

“I am sure I don’t; and I thought you agreed with me, Clara, about the restless, unsatisfied spirit of the present day, which is for ever driving people away from their homes and their duties.”

“So I do, Mr. Brown. All this going to and fro upon the earth reminds me of Satan in the days of Job; and these snorting, murderous, fire-vomiting trains are surely the devil’s carriages. Still, when I was young, my father and your good father, Mr. Brown, used to take their daughters about a little in a proper

way. I was twice in London, it was two days' journey in the mail. We once shared a post-chaise with your father and sister, to go to Bath, and such a dinner we had at the 'Green Dragon!' Ah! these were the days! But, at any rate, I feel sure—almost sure—change would do Hannah good," said Clara, whose intuitions were generally much more correct than her arguments.

"Well, if you think so," with desperate resolution, "let her have a change. She has done much for me, and I must do something for her. I am an old man, and miss anything I am accustomed to. Still to miss her for a few weeks,"—he stopped and added, looking out from the dining-room window on the churchyard, and the great box-ottoman tombstone, with the iron railings round it,—“I must be there first, Clara.”

“Nonsense, Mr. Brown!” said Clara, crossly. “Nobody is going to lie there yet awhile that I know of;” but as she spoke there was a tear in her eye. Clara was often cross when anything occurred to awaken in her unusual emotions, perhaps because laughing was at all times more pleasant to her, and more in harmony with her nature, than crying.

Hannah did feel a gleam of something like pleasure when she heard she was to go from home. It seemed to her that it would be a relief to see no longer for a time the old familiar objects. But where was the delight she would once have felt, had she known that she was actually to behold lakes and mountains, and the great ocean itself? Faint in comparison was the sensation she now experienced; and the idea of the packing,

and the journey, and the strange people she should see, was almost overwhelming; and thens he would think sadly. What a strange thing life is, and how, when a wish is at last fulfilled, the fulfilment comes when the power to enjoy has passed away!

Of course, nobody could leave Goslingford to go anywhere without the event creating a certain amount of talking. But that Hannah Brown should go from home, not to Buttonborough, but actually on a trip to North Wales, was little less puzzling and interesting to the Goslingford world, than the existence of Stonehenge on the middle of Salisbury Plain is to the world of archæologists and geologists. At first her going was disbelieved, but her own and Miss Wellby's announcement of the fact placed it beyond a doubt. When some one,

too, had asked Mr. Brown about it, even he had not denied it, but murmured something about "spring winds," and her mother having been delicate at Hannah's age.

The Brownites and the Smithites, as was natural, took opposite views of the causes and the propriety of Hannah leaving home. If the Smithites in general "had been only daughters with aged fathers, they would not have left them solitary in their old age, to seek for their own pleasure. If *they* had been disappointed in love, *they* would not have worn the willow like Hannah Brown. It was unladylike—it was indelicate, undignified." They had apparently quite forgotten that not much more than half a year ago Hannah had been heartless and unfeeling, because she had not shown

more disappointment. Poor Hannah, it seemed, could not hit the happy medium in which alone lay feminine propriety ; and it is my belief, if she had, it would have been all the same.

My dear friends, if you have a kind neighbour who is always considerably pointing out your faults to yourself, as well as to everybody else, take my advice, and do not alter your proceedings. Whatever you do will be wrong, simply because it is you who do it. Your only hope is in losing your fortune and your position, which will naturally draw out the milk of human kindness in the compassionate bosom of your friendly neighbour, who will then probably discover that “ poor —— is a good creature, with all his follies,” and will henceforth patronize instead of censuring you,—that is, if you

show the humility becoming your fallen fortunes.

The two elder Miss Smiths snuffed the air very much, and the sweep of their flounces created a greater gale than ever, when they heard of Hannah's delicate health and projected journey. They did not say much, but their looks were eloquent enough, and seemed to proclaim how contemptible and silly Miss Brown was, and how differently they would have acted. Miss Laura Victoria was the only one of the family who spoke much on the subject, and it was to defend Hannah Brown. She "had not seen much of her, but she had always liked her. Edgar would never tell exactly what had passed between him and the Browns, but she was quite sure it had been all that old tyrant, Mr. Brown; and Hannah, poor thing, had

not much spirit, but she was sorry for her, very sorry for her; but it was too late now."

The Brown party, of course, upheld both Hannah and her father. They did not believe Hannah was wearing the willow. Mr. Brown had said it was the spring winds, and what was more likely, considering she had never looked very strong? No wonder her father was a little anxious about her, considering she was the last of the family. "Mr Brown was such a fond father," Miss Clara Wellby said; "and as for Hannah, she was quite astonished to hear people talk. The girl only wanted a little change,—all girls did now and then; and as for wearing the willow," said Clara, boldly, "I have no patience with such stuff and nonsense. Why should she wear the

willow? To my certain knowledge, she might have had him if she had liked."

Clara Wellby was a woman of spirit and of pride. She would have died ere she would have worn the willow, and in her love for Hannah, and in the warmth of her Brownite zeal, she was resolved that no one should believe that her young friend did so either. But when she made the above speech in the presence of Miss Richards, that good soul looked very unhappy, and heaved a deep sigh. It was at a small, quiet, gossiping tea-party of middle-aged ladies only. Clara turned round on her like an amiable tigress.

"What are you groaning for, Harriet, as if you were at a Wesleyan prayer-meeting? I am not good enough to be guilty of a pious fraud, and I tell you, Mr. Brown never refused his consent to

Hannah, and I maintain she might have had him if she had liked."

As Miss Clara had a very high character for truthfulness, neither Miss Harriet nor any one else could doubt her after so positive an assertion; but no further light on the interesting subject was to be gained from her. Indeed, she feared her zeal had already led her to say rather too much. And so the Goslingford world was left to the solution of the puzzle presented by this new phase of the vexed question. There appeared to be no way of deciding it but by appealing to Edgar Smith himself; and even the curiosity of Goslingford, inimical or friendly as the case might be, was not quite capable of such effrontery.

But the Smithites were not slow to perceive that an advantage might be

obtained from poor Clara's triumphant assertion. If Mr. Brown had not refused his consent, then Hannah's conduct had really been that of a heartless jilt—quite infamous; and on all sides arose to this effect quite a Smithite chorus—almost the only Smithites who did not join in it being Mrs. Westcote and her daughter.

Mary Westcote was very certain Hannah Brown would have given her eyes for Edgar Smith. *She* refuse him of her own free will! “Don't tell her.” Miss Westcote did not give herself much concern about being consistent.

CHAPTER XIII.

NORTH WALES.

IT was July before Miss Wellby and Hannah Brown had completed their arrangements for a trip to North Wales—the locality which had been fixed upon as altogether the most desirable to visit. Miss Clara, in the affairs of ordinary life, was not a slow person, but a journey was with her, and still more with Mr. Brown, a solemn affair, not

to be entered into without due talking, and fussing, and running about. Then she had to calm the fears of her friend, Miss Harriet Richards, which, to tell the truth, though she would not have confessed it, she in some degree shared. In the opinion of that good soul, railways were one of the crying sins of the age. Although she was too amiable to have left her dying testimony against them, as did Alexander Campbell, one of the "Men of the North," against "the ships that keep their course in spite of the weather—that presumptuous sin," yet she did not the less think them an impatient tampering with the source of all evil. That anyone should travel by railway, was, in her opinion, a tempting of Providence; but that Hannah Brown, who had already, as it were, been mi-

raculously preserved in an actual, *bonâ fide* accident, should think of again audaciously risking her life, was almost appalling, and she remonstrated with Clara for leading her young friend into temptation. The first time she did so, Clara turned a deaf ear to her, merely answering by a "humph," for, to tell the truth, she was not without some misgivings herself, not precisely in a religious point of view, but she neither liked nor approved of anything so innovating as trains; he was also secretly a little nervous about them, and she felt a degree of uncomfortable responsibility in having the care of poor old Mr. Brown's only remaining child, with this additional anxiety.

Now she would not for the world have frightened old Mr. Brown, or have

deprived Hannah of the benefit she was sure the trip would confer upon her; but the evening after Harriet had made her remonstrance, she remarked, as she was drinking tea at the Browns—

“How I wish this had been in the good old days, and that Hannah and I could have gone in a post-chaise! One sees so much more of the country, and one can have comfortable meals at inns, and have one’s time at one’s own disposal, instead of being hurried, and bustled, and hustled by people of all ranks, at these dreadful stations, where you must eat your plate of wretched cold meat so quick, it gives you indigestion, while the noise and the clatter of a couple of hundred people all talking at once is enough to deafen you

for evermore, and to addle your brains to the end of your life."

"And the confusion of ranks," said Mr. Brown, "is so detestable." There is nothing so levelling as these trains. Nothing, in my opinion, has contributed so much to the popular democratic notions of the times, that the taxes should be imposed by those who don't pay them, and that the ignorant should rule the educated."

"I have no doubt, Mr. Brown, it is exactly as you say. When our aristocracy never travelled except in a carriage and four horses, they were much more looked up to than they are now; and respectable clergymen's and lawyers' daughters were in a very different position in a post-chaise and pair. I suppose one could hardly go in a post-chaise now?"

“No, you could not. I have thought of it, Clara ; but it would not answer. If it is necessary for Hannah to travel, she must travel in the only way the mysterious course of Providence has now left her. It is not our fault that she must go by train, and, doubtless, God’s hand will be over her there in the future, as it has been in the past.”

Now, Clara was at once struck with the superiority of Mr. Brown’s religious sentiments to those of Miss Richards ; so, when that lady renewed the attack, she was not listened to so mildly as on the previous occasion.

“There is no other way for us to go, Harriet ; and as to tempting Providence, I should like to know if God is not with us in the railway train just as much as He is with us by our own fire-side.”

“Of course He is, Clara; but in a different way.”

“How do you mean in a different way? People have been killed in their own chimney-corner before now, No, no, Harriet; what is written, is written; and what is to be, is to be. That is your favourite doctrine, you know.”

“Oh, Clara, how you do misunderstand! That is fatalism, not predestination.”

“Well, call it what you like. All I know is, that if we all live till next week, it is predestined that Hannah and I set off by railway train to North Wales. And now, as I have thousands of things to see to, I have no time to talk any more nonsense on the subject, so good-bye.”

It was, however, some comfort to Miss Clara to reflect that, when they really got into North Wales, there would be other

modes of conveyance than railway trains; but her feelings on this point she did not, of course, communicate to her friend Miss Richards.

Miss Wellby and Hannah had, on the whole, fine weather for their excursion. It rained, of course, frequently amongst the Welsh mountains; once or twice they were prevented by mists from seeing the finest views, and once they were wet to the skin. Hannah bore all these *contre-temps* with great equanimity; but not so Miss Clara. Every little accident always fussed, and agitated, and excited that kind-hearted creature. She was not, perhaps, the choicest of travelling companions, and yet there have been many worse; for her ill-humour never was of long duration; she was very cheerful in the intervals, making many odd and piquant remarks;

and entirely devoted to Hannah's welfare, though she frequently manifested this devotion in the most despotic, and, occasionally, somewhat capricious manner. At first, the shy, timid Hannah had felt as if she should like to sink into the earth when Clara began to scold in every direction, as if she had been at home in Goslingford. And when she commenced to teach the chambermaids how to make beds, in the only way beds ought to be made; when she rated the waiters for laying the tables, differing in some minute particular from the only manner which she conceived to be orthodox; when she informed the landlady that inns were not what they used to be in her time, and more than hinted that her cook knew nothing whatever about the composition of a genuine old-fashioned rice-pudding—

Miss Clara's favourite dish ; in such moments as these, Hannah would have given the world she had never left home.

Then, though Clara said she enjoyed scenery, and indeed really appeared to enjoy it after some fashion of her own, it was not in Hannah's fashion. When Hannah would have liked on some sweet sunset evening to have sat in silence and admired the gold, and purple, and opal tints melting into shadows and darkness on the mountain tops ; or to have watched, in pleasant melancholy, the grey mists stealing up the valleys, or to have gazed at the moon as she rose over the shoulder of the hill, and bathed herself in the dews of the summer night ; then, precisely it was that Miss Clara became most talkative. All pleasure or happiness, from whatsoever source derived, made Miss Clara loqua-

cious, and she could not believe that any one was pleased or happy who sat silent. That "Speech is silvern, and Silence is golden," was far indeed from being the creed of Miss Clara Wellby.

"You don't seem to admire the view, Hannah. Dear me! I should have expected you to fall into raptures with these hills, and those fine clouds there in the west. Even I, who do not pretend to have such a turn for these things as you have, say a great deal more about them than you do. I should have thought you would have exhausted the dictionary in praising them, and hardly have been able to find words to express your admiration."

"I cannot find words, Aunt Clara," said Hannah, in mild exculpation, but her meaning was lost on her companion;

“but you must not fancy I am not enjoying myself, for indeed I am. I feel so much stronger and better.”

And Miss Wellby was consoled, though, at the same time, a little provoked by what she considered Hannah's undemonstrative manner. Sometimes Hannah would have spoken, would have quoted some line of poetry, or even have given utterance to some romantic sentiment of her own, suggested by all the novelty and beauty, had she not been quite certain that, according to her humour, Miss Clara would either have laughed at her, cut her short with a witticism, or informed her that “she was thankful to say she knew nothing about poetry. Real life was enough for her.”

Still, on the whole, it may be doubted if Hannah, considering the purpose for

which she went, could have had a better companion. Even the trifling anxieties and petty miseries caused her by Clara's eccentricities did her good, and at last even amused her. This, of course, to romantic readers, if any such indeed have followed me so far in my prosaic tale, must appear very uninteresting in Hannah Brown. But then, you see, Hannah Brown was—Hannah Brown, and not Lady Clarinda Capulet, or Lady Meliora Montague. Doubtless, if she had been one of these exalted damsels, she would have found poor Miss Clara's uncongeniality unbearable rather than amusing. Her soul would have withered, her spirits have been oppressed, she would have derived no enjoyment from the mountain scenery, she would have apostrophised solitude, she would have lost her appe-

tite ; impatience, if not concealment, would have preyed on her damask cheek, and she would have returned home to her flinty-hearted father, pining away with green and yellow melancholy. But then Hannah Brown's father, though in one respect his conduct had been worthy of a parent Montague or a parent Capulet—though he was actually an attorney, or perhaps, because he was an attorney, and not my Lord Capulet or Baron Montague—was not flinty-hearted. He loved his daughter Hannah, I do not say with no common love,—for, thank God, such love is not very uncommon,—but he loved her with a father's love, that love which the Great Father of all has employed as a type of His own ; and, in spite of all the suffering he had caused her, Hannah knew it. She was anxious to be

well and happy, for his sake and her own too. Romantic as she was in some respects, it had never struck her that it would be more interesting or desirable to die, or to be miserable, than to be in good health or in tolerable spirits. So she looked at the bright side of Miss Clara—and there really was a very bright side to look at—and, in spite of their unsuitableness in some things, they got on very well together on the whole, and enjoyed themselves according to their different temperaments. The rose came back to Hannah's cheek, the light to her eye, and elasticity to her step. Miss Clara Wellby's scheme had succeeded.

CHAPTER XIV.

A THUNDERSTORM.

THERE was one pretty valley in North Wales, which, so much smitten were they with its beauties, Miss Wellby and Hannah had made up their minds to revisit and spend a week in before their return home. It was a locality not much frequented by ordinary tourists, as it diverged considerably from the main-road, "as quiet and secluded," said Hannah,

“as Llangollen must have been when Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby first took up their abode there.”

“But don’t expect me, Hannah,” said Miss Clara, “to be either a Lady Eleanor or a Miss Ponsonby. You know I have no turn for romantic seclusion. Mountains may be very well, but men and women are better. I wonder how often Lady Eleanor and her friend quarrelled !”

“Never, I should think, Aunt Clara, or they would not have remained so long together.”

“Impossible, my dear ; I tell you they must have quarrelled. Only fancy Harriet Richards and me living alone together in a Welsh valley !”

Hannah burst into the heartiest laugh she had had for many a day.

“Indeed, Aunt Clara, I cannot fancy it.”

“So you are laughing at me and poor Harriet, you monkey! Well, it does me good to hear you laugh, and I shall be contented to act the part of the romantic friend here with you for a week.”

It was on a hot and sultry Saturday that the travellers arrived at Llan Gwdd and took up their abode in a pretty little cottage where they had previously engaged lodgings. It was almost the only place in the tiny village where they could have been accommodated. A pretty little cottage it was, standing under a gorse-clad hill, with a stream tumbling and brawling over a rocky bed a few paces in front, and a few fine beech trees overhanging the stream on the opposite bank. Some cottages were scattered at short distances about

the vale, and on a green knoll further down the stream, stood the little Welsh church, not architectural, certainly, but possessing, in spite of its want of taste—to the perversely poetic mind—a certain beauty from its associations with village piety and purity, and with that rural simplicity which minds, as I have said, perversely poetic, insist on connecting with seclusion and interesting scenery. Such people—and Hannah Brown, in spite of her plebeian name and common-place associations, was one of these—do not like to be told that wickedness like goodness has no locality—that the same evil passions rage in the “peaceful vale,” as in the “wicked” city. I can only say, may such persons be long before their eyes are opened! It is not likely they will take a high rank

among political economists, whatever they may do among social reformers. And if you, my dear reader, wonder what I mean by these last few words, I can only say, that to do moral good to our neighbours, it is more necessary to believe in the good already in them than to know of the evil. A paradox, you will say, but what are life and morality, and even Christianity, but paradoxes?

And so Hannah Brown thought what a lovely village was Llan Gwdd, and what an innocent, peaceful race must be its inhabitants, and how sweetly the life of the village pastor must there glide away! Surely there could be no Brown and Smith factions in Llan Gwdd.

Hannah and Miss Clara, having had an early tea, set out, at the expressed

wish of the former, on a walk to the churchyard. The landlady assured them that, unless they climbed to the summit of one of the hills, there was not a finer view in the whole vale than from the church door. As they walked thither, Clara criticising the untidy appearance of the cottage doors, and contrasting them unfavourably with those of the villages round Goslingford, and Hannah endeavouring, as far as possible, to be blind to all defects, and even defending some of them as picturesque, neither of them observed what packs of heavy clouds were beginning to gather, or how a breeze had commenced to rush through the hitherto motionless foliage, turning up the backs of the leaves with a low, flapping sound.

“Picturesque, Hannah! Don’t tell me

that a dirty broken wheelbarrow is half as pretty in front of a cottage as a few nice gillyflowers and marigolds."

"I did not say it was as pretty—I only said ——"

"I have a great mind, Hannah, to go and tell that lazy high-cheek-boned-looking Welshman that he ought to be ashamed to stand there smoking his pipe, and looking contentedly at all that rubbish, instead of removing it at once."

"Oh, no, Aunt Clara, pray don't. It will only——"

Here Hannah was interrupted by a peal of thunder.

"Thunder!" cried Clara. "Let us go home at once."

"It would not take us three minutes longer, Aunt Clara, just to go to the church door, as we are here. Do, Aunt

Clara ! The view will be so very fine, with these magnificent lights and shadows."

"Lights and shadows ! It will be all shadows in a minute, I am thinking. But, perhaps, as dirt is picturesque, wet clothes are romantic."

But Hannah coaxed, and Miss Wellby always yielded when she was coaxed, even against her better judgment.

They had almost reached the church door, and Hannah had just turned round to admire a gigantic black shadow on the shoulder of the opposite hill, while the summit stood out from it in preternatural light, when a vivid flash of forked lightning from the clouds was immediately succeeded by a tremendous peal of thunder.

"There now, Hannah ! Did not I tell you ?—and these great drops of rain—

hail, I declare. We shall be wet to the skin, and you will catch your death with cold. Oh, what will your father say? I shall never forgive myself. You silly child, to insist on coming up here in a thunderstorm!" And tears of vexation stood in Miss Clara's eyes.

"But we should not have had time to get back."

"Time! Don't talk nonsense, Hannah. How can you be so provokingly cool?"

"Indeed, Aunt Clara, I am very hot."

"All the worse! You will have a fever, or you will be struck with lightning. Don't go near the tree, I say;" and Miss Clara, looking wildly about for shelter, seized the handle of the church door, and shook it as if she would break the door open.

To her surprise it yielded to her

grasp, and she and Hannah hastily sought the little sanctuary it offered from the rage of the storm. They had not closed the door when Hannah shrank shyly back as she perceived a gentleman—evidently the clergyman himself—at a short distance, and hastening towards them.

“I beg pardon,” said Miss Wellby, smoothing her ruffled plumage, “but we were afraid of being struck by lightning.”

“Pray make no apology. I am only glad I happened to be in the church, as otherwise the door would have been locked.”

The speaker was a very mild, very pale young man, with very fine dark eyes, and that air of melancholy which by young ladies of a romantic temperament is considered “interesting.” He

had too a mild, placid voice, and a gentle, dreamy manner. He was not exactly Miss Clara's type either of man or clergyman; still she recognised in him a gentleman, and Miss Clara was always glad to have anyone to speak to. So, while the storm lasted, she related to him, in her own voluble style, how they had been touring, how they had walked up to see the view, and had been caught in the storm; descanting on her own nervousness about a thunderstorm, her responsibility in having the care of Hannah, her anxiety on her account, and her earnest desire to take her home to her father, whose only child she was, in good health.

The young clergyman listened politely, but, Hannah could not help fancying, a little absently, and Hannah wished fer-

vently that Miss Clara were a little less eccentric. As Miss Wellby had spoken of her, he had glanced at her once or twice, and she had coloured deeply to find herself made the subject of conversation.

"This is not a very pretty church," at last said Miss Clara.

"No," he replied, becoming a little animated, but still in a subdued way; "it is sadly wanting in everything ecclesiastical. I should be quite unhappy if I did not hope to see it improved. It is the object I live for."

"And to improve the people, too."

He looked at her with some interest. "Yes; but the one object is included in the other. As the worshippers, so the temple. I have nothing else to live for."

"Indeed," said Hannah, sympathisingly,

as sympathy seemed expected, but feeling awkward, and not knowing what else to say. Miss Wellby, however, was restrained by no such scruples, and asked, point blank—

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that she who was the partner of all my cares, the angel of my life, lies under the turf there outside—the chancel I was going to say—but I mean where the chancel ought to be. Her baby, too, is with her, and I have nothing left but to go on my work alone. I visit her grave every day.”

“Then you are very wrong. That kind of sorrow is not healthy. I don’t approve of such sentimentalism.”

Hannah looked deprecatingly at the young clergyman. Her horror lest he

should be offended at Miss Clara's speech, took away for the moment all shyness on her own account. But he only smiled faintly, with a sort of amiable melancholy towards Hannah, as much as to say—

“I don't expect to be comprehended by everybody.”

The storm had now abated, and though the trees dripped, and the roads ran like water-courses, the ladies thought it better to make the best of their way to their lodgings. The young clergyman politely offered to go and fetch umbrellas and goloshes—an offer which they declined with many thanks. He then asked permission to call on them in the beginning of the week—a permission which they gladly accorded.

“I declare, Hannah,” said Miss Clara,

as they plunged on their way, "we have had quite an adventure. What a remarkably handsome, interesting young man! and so polite and gentlemanly."

"I rather wonder," said Hannah, "how he could speak of his dead wife and his innermost feelings to such strangers."

"I daresay he has nobody else to speak to about them. I don't approve, however, of his visiting her grave in that way; it is quite morbid. People should not brood and sentimentalise over their sorrows, Hannah, as I have often told you. I will try to cure him as I have cured you, that is, if he is worth curing. I will ask the landlady about him."

The landlady, who was something of a gossiping body, was nothing loth to communicate, in her broken English, all she knew and all she thought about Mr.

Edwards. "He had been their parson now for five years. They had had a very different kind of parson before he came, a very good-natured man, and not at all proud. He took all his meals with Molly Jones in the kitchen, and his glass of beer and his pipe with anybody in the parish. To be sure he was often too late for church, and sometimes there was on wet days no service at all; and he did not go to see people ill of bad fevers, like Parson Edwards, but he were a very good-natured man for all that. But everything were changed when Parson Edwards came. He seemed so grandly dressed, and so high and mighty at first, nobody liked him. He had his Welsh service and his English service regular every Sunday. He had the church made grand, and all the rubbish cleared away

at his own expense, though he was not rich; and he preached every Sunday against the Methodists, and the Ranters, and the Mormonites, and said how as there was but one true church; and folks said he was a Jesuit, and prayed to an image; and the dissenters said he had the mark of the beast, and I know not what; but he's a kind gentleman in sickness, and visits the sick at any hour of the day or night, and brings down nice things, and so did Mrs. Edwards, poor thing! He brought her home here, such a sweet pretty bride, only two years ago, and she played on the—it is too hard a name for me—in the church, and sang so sweet. And then the baby was born,—and she died of the childbed fever,—and he buried the child a fortnight after the wife. And he was,

they say, like to have gone out of his mind at first. And then he put up a fine carved stone to her—a very idolatrous thing, the Ranters say, with a cross on it, and a round thing, and a three-sided thing, which all mean something Popish; and he goes to pray there every day, and he visits more than ever, and he's always a-talking of his wife."

"Is he rich?" asked Miss Clara.

"No, ma'am—not as I knows of. He is a gentleman born, and can trace his family, they say, in the female line, to Owen Glyndwr."

Both the ladies were much interested in this narrative, though Miss Clara shook her head over the cross on the tombstone, and thought it almost as Popish as the Ranters did. She feared Mr. Edwards was a "Puseyite."

Hannah still thought it odd he should have spoken to strangers about his feelings, but she did not doubt, now, that his grief had been sincere ; and she began to meditate on the differences in character. Miss Clara still maintained there was nothing odd in it ; she liked outspoken people, for her part.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WELSH PARSON.

THE day after the thunderstorm, which was Sunday, proved fine. Miss Clara and her young friend attended English service in the little church. Mr. Edwards did the whole duty. He read well, but in rather a melancholy manner; and he preached also, Miss Clara declared, in a very melancholy strain. Hannah liked the sermon; there was something sooth-

ing in it, and in the not unmelodious cadence of the preacher's voice. Hannah felt as she walked out of the simple little church, beneath the bright summer sky and under the golden hills, that it was altogether, in spite of the inferiority of the building, not only more romantic than the church at Goslingford, but that, at that moment, it seemed more favourable to the devotional feelings. The high-crowned hats of the Welshwomen seemed more in harmony with pious thoughts, than the gay bonnets and fine flowers of Miss Westcote and the Miss Splints. But remember, reader, I do not quite uphold Hannah in this sentiment. It is the business of religion to convert the outward things of life into its own essence, and not to be converted by them. If this were generally recognised,

what floods of useless discussion might we be spared with regard to what is worldly or unworldly. Sumptuary laws are at all times odious, and never more so than when enforced by religious penalties. There is no essential connection between dinginess and holiness, and artificial flowers even are not always the insignia of candidates for the infernal regions.

Perhaps, after all, there might have been as much jealousy between Mary Jones and Elizabeth Roberts about their high-crowned hats and full borders, as between Miss Westcote and Miss Julietta Smith about their Buttonborough bonnets and French flowers. However, be that as it may, it pleased Hannah, like many other people, to look at village life in its poetic aspect. Hannah's life had hitherto been but country-town life, and everybody knows

how that is the most prosaic of all forms of existence. Fashionable life in a great city or in a foreign town, with lords and ladies making love in blank verse—or pastoral life, with village maidens and rustic swains

“Behind the hawthorn in the dale,”

pouring out the same tale with the untutored eloquence of simplicity—has so much more to attract the imagination of those who have not yet discovered that all romance lies in the heart and all greatness in the soul. True, Hannah had discovered that Smiths and Browns in their every-day bourgeois sphere could be as romantically unreasonable and as pertinaciously ill-tempered as any Montague or Capulet in Verona. She had, to some extent, discovered painfully the romance there is in commonplace things,

but she had not yet discovered the commonplace there is in romantic things.

Early on Monday Mr. Edwards called, as he had promised. He was exactly what young ladies in country towns call an "interesting young man," and if destiny and a bishop had licensed him to a country town curacy, half the young ladies of the place would immediately have been smitten with a zeal for church principles and a fondness for ecclesiastical needle-work. Even Hannah could not help thinking how the Miss Splints would have raved about him, and how dissent and chapel-going would have been more odious than ever to the Miss Smiths. I will not say what even Hannah herself might have thought and felt in former days; but at this moment she still preferred blue eyes to black, a moustache to

a shaven lip, and L'Allegro to Il Penseroso. She could not, however, but acknowledge that the young Welshman was very agreeable, and seemed very amiable. He quite won Miss Clara's heart by the open and confidential manner in which he spoke to her.

She soon discovered his whole history, and she was equally communicative in her turn. He offered to take them to all the best walks and finest points of view, and he said what a treat it was to him, in his loneliness and seclusion, to have the society of two educated persons, and more especially educated ladies. He generally addressed Miss Wellby, but Hannah had always a consciousness that what he said was even more especially meant for her. Miss Wellby invited him to return to early tea in the evening, and afterwards to take a walk.

As soon as he was gone, Miss Clara was loud in his praise.

“Such a charming—such a handsome young man! So devoted—so gentleman-like! She had heard of his family long ago, and knew them to be most respectably, indeed, highly connected. She was sure there was nobody in Goslingford for a moment to be compared with him.”

To this speech Hannah made no rejoinder, but Miss Clara fancied she distinguished a scarcely audible sigh. This sigh threw her into rather a bad humour, both with Hannah and herself, and she sat silent and moody for some time, returning to all her companion's attempts at conversation merely monosyllabic answers. At last she appeared to make a sudden resolution, and all at once began to talk and harangue in her natural lively, rambling way.

Mr. Edwards came to tea, not only that night, but every night while the two ladies remained—and they prolonged their stay a whole week beyond the time they had originally intended. Every day the young parson stood higher and higher in Miss Clara's good opinion. Not that by any means they agreed about everything. Miss Wellby scolded the young man for his Tractarianism, and they had many arguments on the subject, if those could be called arguments which consisted in banter and declamation on the one side, and quietly begging the question on the other. Miss Clara did not find Mr. Edwards, as an antagonist, quite so easy to demolish as Miss Harriet Richards. Hannah took little share in the controversy, though Mr. Edwards sometimes appealed to her in words, and

still oftener in looks, but she generally replied that she was no polemic.

“I should not have thought you were, Miss Brown; but I should think—I am sure you must have a feeling for the beauty of holiness.”

“I trust I have, Mr. Edwards; but surely the beauty of holiness consists rather in the charity which suffers long and is kind, than in ceremonies or decorations.”

“Oh! Miss Brown,” said the young man, looking much hurt. “You cannot surely suppose that I think otherwise.”

Hannah coloured up with vexation.

“Forgive me,” she said, “if I seemed to insinuate that you did, for indeed I do not think so. I have heard and seen too much of your work in this parish.”

Mr. Edwards said nothing, but he looked straight at Hannah, intensely gratified—so intensely gratified that she felt quite annoyed, and passed the rest of the evening in perfect silence. As for Miss Clara, she seemed to think Hannah had gained a complete victory on their side of the question, and made up, by her liveliness and talkativeness, for her young friend's silence. Mr. Edwards, too, seemed in excellent spirits; but the argument appeared, for the time, to have lost all interest for him, and he replied to Miss Wellby almost at random.

During the latter part of their stay at Llan Gwdd, the young parson talked much less sadly than he had done during the earlier part of their visit. He even seemed to admit that

there might be such a thing as consolation, and a faint possibility that, even for him, the world might not be a wilderness; or, if it was a wilderness, that an occasional wild-flower might blossom by the wayside.

“We have done him a great deal of good, Hannah, I think,” said Miss Wellby. “He looks as well and as happy again as when we came. What a very charming and agreeable young man he is—and so gentlemanly! One sees very few such.”

“Do you think so?”

“Don’t you? I am sure there is nobody to be compared with him in Goslingford.”

“I don’t know that, Aunt Clara.”

“But I know it, Hannah, and I have seen much more of the world

than you have. And then, what a heart he seems to have! What a husband he seems to have been! And what polite manners he has! How kind of him to bring you such a pretty bouquet every day, ever since he heard you say you were fond of flowers!"

"I think," said Hannah, "he had better have strewed them on his wife's grave."

"Hannah, you are a goose!—and very unjust, and very unreasonable. I have no respect for a man, or anybody else, who breaks his heart."

"You will not require to despise many men on that account, Aunt Clara," said Hannah, with unwonted bitterness. "Men don't break their hearts, or, if they do, the fracture is easily repaired."

“So much the better, Hannah. I see nothing but sin in wilful misery.”

“But misery and constancy are not the same thing.”

“No, the contrary thing, of course, when people still have their sweet-hearts and wives; but when they have lost them, what is miserable constancy but constant misery?” And Miss Clara turned away with the air of having exhausted all that was to be said on the subject.

Hannah said no more then, but the next morning she expressed herself not sorry that their sojourn at Llan Gwdd now drew to a close. She “felt quite well again, and should be glad to be at home.”

“Have you not enjoyed yourself here, then?” asked Clara, sharply.

“Very much indeed.”

“Then I cannot understand why you should wish to go. Girls are so fidgety, and never know their own minds.”

Hannah made no answer, but thought she knew her own mind very well. Miss Wellby hardly recovered her good humour till Mr. Edwards arrived to tea, and to take his farewell walk with them.

CHAPTER XVI.

FAREWELLS.

THE REVEREND EDWARD EDWARDS was looking even handsomer than usual. Some emotion, not unlike excitement, brightened his fine dark eyes, and there was an interesting mixture of melancholy and animation in his manner. He looked just the man for a lady-killer. But the Rev. Edward Edwards hardly knew his own powers, and he

had the great disadvantage of being himself very susceptible. To be in love yourself generally lessens your chance of making another in love with you, perhaps because we all prefer that which is difficult of attainment. A woman without a heart is the most likely woman to have a dozen lovers—a dozen rivals for that which does not exist.

Fortunately for himself, Mr. Edwards hitherto had not had much opportunity for exciting the admiration of the other sex. He was a younger son of a Welsh squire of decayed fortunes, and had been educated in retirement almost as great as that which was now his lot. In early life he had been sent to Lampeter College, where he had almost immediately formed an attachment to the lady who afterwards became his wife. Through her father's

interest he had obtained the living of Llan Gwdd, and as soon as he had scraped together enough to furnish his house, they were married. Since her death, up to the present time, he had not once seen the face of any woman beyond the pastoral Mollys and Jennys of his flock, and he had persuaded himself that he did not wish to see the face of one. In his own language, his heart was "wedded to the grave." One might infer, however, from the eagerness with which he had sought the society of the two stranger ladies, that he was not quite dead to female charms, and to-night especially he looked so animated, that one would never have guessed that he was an inconsolable widower. It was a very fine evening, the days were yet long, and as tea was primitively early (that is, if his-

tory will permit me the mention of the meal as primitive at all), and there was plenty of daylight yet to come, Mr. Edwards proposed that they should spend this their last evening in climbing to the top of a high hill which they had not yet mounted, and from which he said there was a magnificent view. Miss Clara did not in a general way like climbing hills. She made, however, no objection on this occasion, merely remarking, "if they dropped her on the way up, she hoped they would pick her up on the way down again."

The hill was skirted at the base by a wood, through which the path lay, and there was a broad green track higher up through the gorse, the deep golden hue of which showed even more brilliantly when contrasted with the woods

below. Miss Clara talked and grumbled through the beech woods; but her grumbling to-night seemed more for a joke than in real earnest. "Why did people climb hills? For her part, she liked level ground, and saw nothing charming in being red-faced and panting. Hills were much prettier to look at than to look from, and she had no idea of running the risk of a fit of apoplexy that she might look upon a fog on the one hand, and on the other a country for all the world like a large tract of village allotments. So with your leave, my young friends, I will sit down on this stump till you come back. My legs and my lungs are both older than yours."

"Then, Aunt Clara, we will not go either. Let us go where you can ac-

company us. Any other view will do as well. They are all pretty."

As Hannah spoke, the young clergyman's face, which I have before noticed as so unusually beaming, suddenly fell many degrees of the physiognomical barometer, and his voice betrayed his vexation.

"I thought you said you should like it so much, and I have watched for days for a suitable evening, and to-night it is neither foggy nor hot."

"Well, well," said Miss Clara, "I will drag up my old legs if you will not go without me, though I have a long journey to-morrow."

"No, no, Aunt Clara, you have taken enough fatigue for me already. I will go to the top of the hill if Mr. Edwards really cares about it."

But as Hannah spoke she could not conceal a slight accent of annoyance. He answered quickly, without a shade of ill-humour, but making no attempt to conceal his mortification—

“If it gives you no pleasure, Miss Brown, it will give me none. I thought it would have pleased you.”

Poor Hannah felt very ungrateful, for she remembered well having expressed a strong wish to climb this very hill, and how kindly he had promised to watch for a good opportunity for her.

“You are very kind,” she said, penitently; “and I should like extremely to see the fine view, if Aunt Clara does not mind.”

His face cleared up a little, though it was far indeed from having the look of entire satisfaction it had had before.

They set off in silence. Hannah did not see how she could have avoided going, and yet she had a sense of something like guilt on her conscience because she had gone. She was neither hard-hearted nor soft-hearted enough to act quite justly towards the Rev. Edward Edwards, and she was somewhat angry both with him and with herself; but as they walked up the hill, the glory of the evening and the beauty of the prospect were not long in having a soothing influence. Then Mr. Edwards' manner was so gentle and unobtrusive, she could not but feel softened towards him, particularly as he had done nothing to merit her displeasure, but the reverse. She therefore admired the view and the sinking sun, and acknowledged that there could not have been a finer

evening for such a walk. And the young parson looked happy again; and, recovering his usual conversational powers, he quoted sentimental poetry, and spoke of the pleasures of sympathy in his usual style. Time was when Hannah might have thought this charming; but, with characteristic human perversity, she did not think so now. As they stood at the top of the hill all alone, by one of those unaccountable flashes of memory which, we know not why, make past scenes seem all at once more real than present ones, Hannah seemed transported in spirit to the garden at the Splints, where she had walked with Edgar Smith on the memorable evening of Mr. Frederick Splint's birthday. It was not nearly so romantic a scene as the present, nor was Edgar Smith, with his

sensible, self-satisfied, resolute countenance, half so like a hero of romance, as the pale, dark-eyed, melancholy young widower. But then the romance of the heart is not always the romance of conventionalities. But be that as it may, the recollection was an unfortunate one for Mr. Edwards. And when he said—

“I shall treasure up the memory of this evening to cheer me through the solitary ones I see in prospect. They were sad enough before you came, Miss Brown, but I shall hardly know how to bear them when you are gone.”

She answered—

“As a way of passing the time, you will no doubt miss us; but the sadness you feel, could, I think, be made neither greater nor less by the society of so recent acquaintances.”

"I am hurt that you should say so, Miss Brown; you then will never think of these to me happy evenings?"

"Yes I shall; but I meant, you must have memories of much deeper interest."

"You do not believe then in consolation?"

She was saved the difficulty of answering by the appearance of Miss Clara, who, impatient of solitude, had climbed part of the way to meet them.

As Mr. Edwards walked home that night to his little parsonage, and a sense of its loneliness smote upon him, his thoughts certainly were not more of the dead than of the living. He wished he had not said so much about his loss being irreparable. His was not the grief cer-

tainly, however much he had once thought so, to which

“Life nothing brighter or darker can bring.”

Indeed I doubt if there can be any such grief, except remorse.

It rained the next morning when the Welsh car stopped at the door of their little lodging to convey the two ladies to the nearest railway station. From thence it was several hours' journey to Buttonborough, and, as the reader knows, still further to Goslingford. But in spite of the rain, they found Mr. Edwards standing under a tree, just where the road to the village turned in to the highway, and half a mile from the parsonage, with a large umbrella in one hand, and a bouquet of flowers in the other.

“I could not think of letting you go,” he said, “without saying farewell. Will you accept these as a little remembrance of Llan Gwdd?” and he extended the bouquet to Hannah.

It seemed impossible to refuse it, after he had taken so much trouble, and yet Hannah felt so loth to accept it, that it gave an air of ungracious embarrassment to her manner. Mr. Edwards sighed audibly, and seemed quite heedless of the rain which poured in torrents on his unprotected person, as he had now lowered the umbrella.

“You are getting wet through,” cried Miss Clara.

“So much the better,” said he, despondingly; “what does it signify what becomes of me?”

“Oh, Mr. Edwards!” cried Hannah; and

then added, from a nervous desire to say something, "they are very pretty flowers."

"Will you remember me at least till they fade, Miss Brown?" he said.

"My memory," said Hannah, "is not so short." But her tone of reproof was lost in a blast of wind and rain. He merely understood she would remember him.

"And now," said Miss Clara, "as I don't wish to be drowned, good-bye, and God bless you, Mr. Edwards; I shall always be happy to see you."

"Farewell," he said, "dear friend, dear Miss Clara;" but he did not speak to Hannah, he merely looked at her.

"Come, come," cried Miss Clara, scolding, "it is too wet and cold to be pathetic; go on, driver." But as she spoke, there was a tear in her eye.

"The nicest young man I ever met,"

said Miss Wellby, as they drove on, in spite of his crosses and his scrapings.

"Now, Hannah, don't be a goose, and throw away the substance for the shadow, like the dog in the fable."

"Mr. Edwards' memory is shorter than mine," said Hannah, again returning to the old idea.

"You mean, my dear, Mr. Edwards is more submissive to the will of Providence, and more ready to make the best of things."

Hannah said nothing; but Miss Clara's was, to say the least, a new way of putting it, and Hannah, like most of Miss Wellby's friends, was obliged to acknowledge, at times, that that lady's random shots went as straight to the mark as if they had been aimed with the utmost precision.

My dear reader, if you are like Hannah, one whose thoughts cling to the past, and in whom memory is stronger than hope, you will, perhaps, say there is nothing so noble as constancy; but if, on the contrary, you are an admirer of strong common sense, and take a practical, I don't say a worldly, view of the advantages and disadvantages of life, you will say that true wisdom and true religion really lie in Miss Clara's theory of making the best of things. If you ask me what I think, what can I answer, but confess that, according to my mood, I have sometimes been of the one opinion and sometimes of the other; and so I suspect had Miss Clara, who, like most preachers, had not, at all times acted up to her own sermons. But let us

not blame either Miss Clara or the preachers.

What sort of sermons would these be, whose doctrine corresponded with the doings of the best of men? It is my belief that the best preachers are always most powerful when they preach on their own weak points.

Hannah, as we know, had a humble mind, and, though Miss Wellby's speech had no effect—what speeches ever have?—in arguing her out of her own feelings, it made her think a little more charitably of Mr. Edwards, and feel a little remorseful towards him. And then she said to herself—

“It is no matter, I shall never see him again. Men cannot feel like women. After all, he cannot help being a man.”

And kind-hearted, irritable Miss Clara

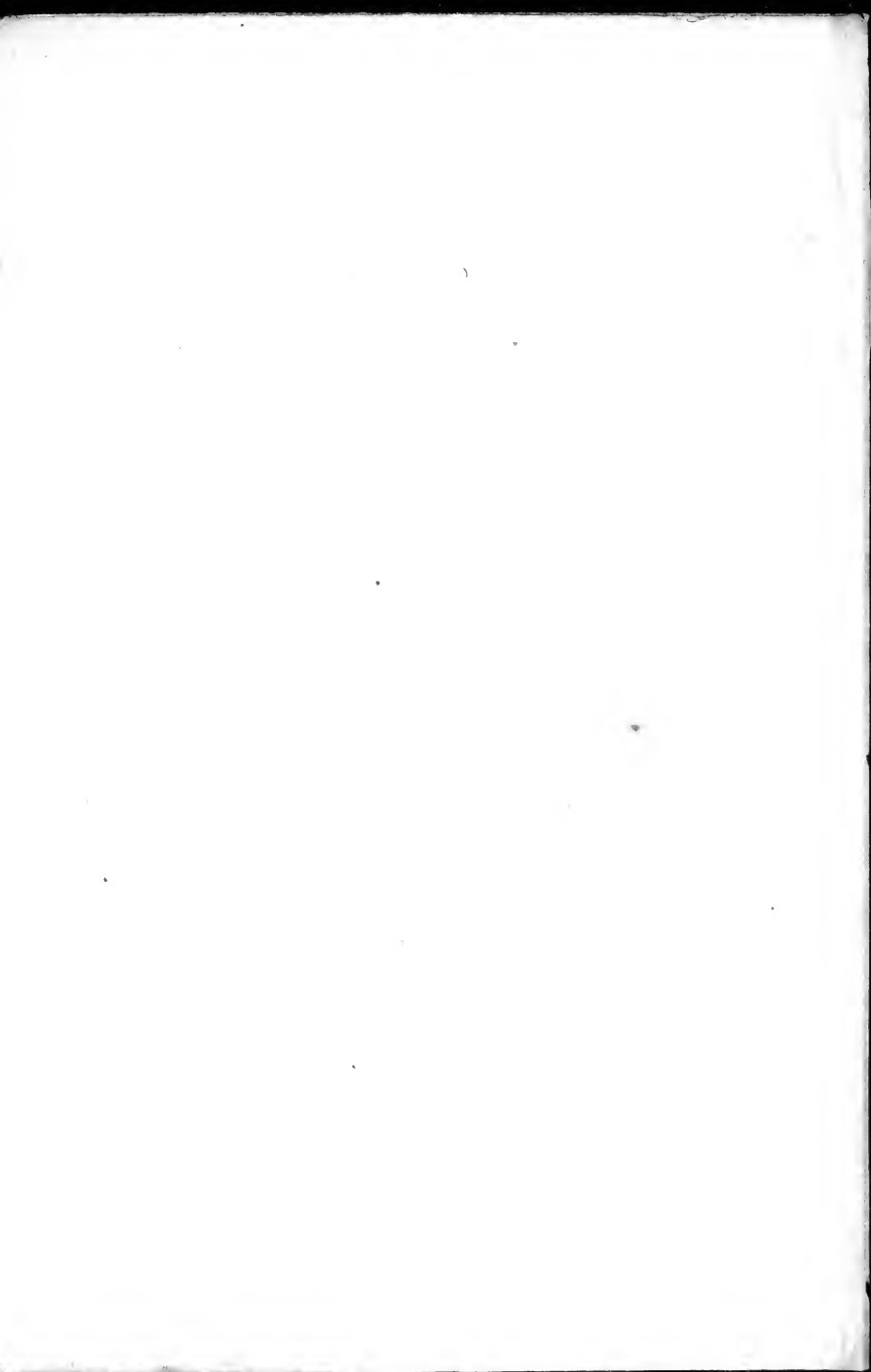
thought of how sadly the poor young clergyman would go home in the dripping rain, and sit down, wet perhaps, in his lonely study, and she felt very cross with Hannah.

She relented towards her, however, long before they reached Goslingford, or even Buttonborough. All irritable feelings were merged in benevolent delight at the notion of restoring Hannah to her father in perfect health, and, in intense satisfaction, the root of which did not, perhaps, lie in benevolence, that such a return was a complete triumph over the Smithites. And then came the qualifying reflection :

“I wish she had only had sense and spirit enough to show that flirting fellow what a much better match she could make. It shows what he is, that

he could ever think of Mary Westcote after Hannah Brown," thought Miss Clara, angrily, and quite oblivious that, after all, Edgar Smith was only doing what she advised Hannah to do—making the best of things.

END OF VOL. I.



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